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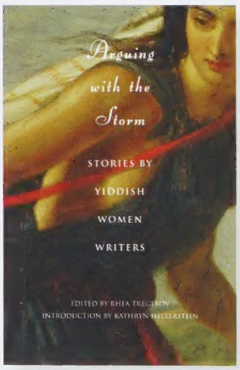

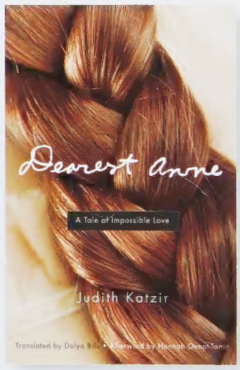

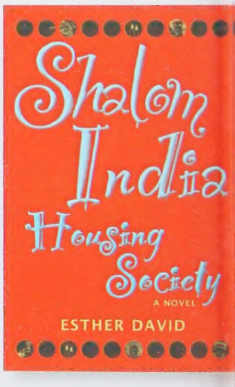

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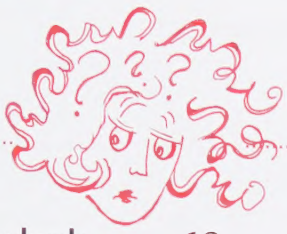
Lilith

vol. 36, no. 2 • summer 2011

*In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings— a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."**



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Cover photo: Champion Hakoah Vienna swimmer Ruth Langer at age 14 broke the Austrian records for the 100- and 400-meter freestyle. In 1938, she fled Austria for Italy, and the following year, five weeks before WWII broke out, she won the last British long-distance swim in the Thames. She settled in London, where she married fellow Hakoah swimmer John Lawrence. Cover photo courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."

—Nessa Rapoport

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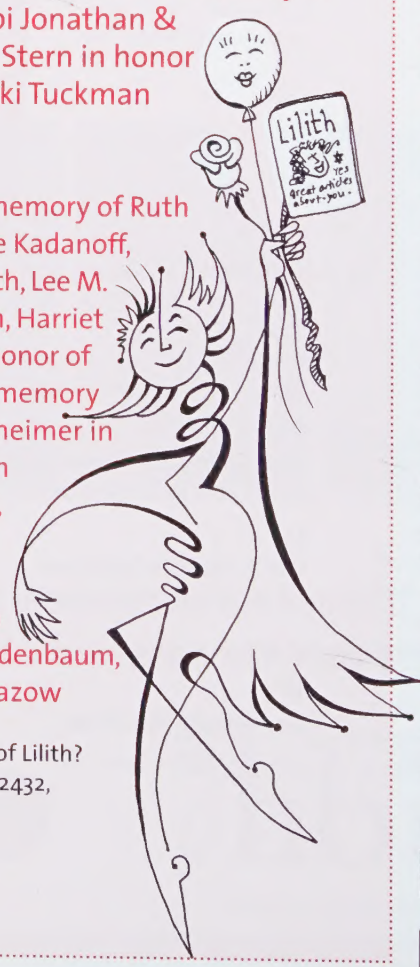

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Martin Buber once famously posited that "all journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware." One of the objects of feminism is to cultivate a heightened awareness of where we're headed—a raised consciousness about those destinations, even if the path's map reveals itself after we've arrived.

How do we connect our own stories about life's journeys—those revealing, shaping anecdotes, often told with studied casualness, about how we left our parents' home, or ended up in the job we have now, or chose the partner we did—with the larger universe? One of the first tenets of the Women's Liberation Movements was that the personal is the political. Every day, feminism teaches the alert among us that our quotidian choices have implications beyond ourselves.

The very different Lilith pieces you're about to read pulse outward, the particular implicating the general, seemingly small episodes offering up larger observations. Take brothers. And sisters. Though the stories grouped together here are deeply idiosyncratic, none like the next, each highlights some ways girls are, still, raised differently from their different-sex siblings. Even an adored and adoring older brother provides evidence of the unequal worship this relationship implies; can you think of a younger brother who would be so open about his older sister? Or a brother mourning in the same way the development of a sister's ideological arc toward disaster? Would a men's magazine invite men to write about their sisters—in an unironic way? Women are still expected to do the emotional heavy lifting, and this includes figuring out what those persistent gender differences may be. Feminism is the lens through which we examine the balance—or lack thereof—in our most personal connections.

The cover story is also about connections, about girl swimmers, some in their early teens, who became role models and role breakers in Vienna in the 1930s. No spoiler here...but just a note that they made difficult personal choices, where their athletic prowess enabled them to escape the Nazis. They couldn't have known their destinations when they began to train in the Danube, but their courage and relentless interdependency led a way out.

There's another angle on female bodies in this issue, about being sexy while pregnant. Let's notice what a privileged preoccupation this is in an era when so many women, even here in the First World, don't have access to family planning or prenatal health monitoring. Challenges to abortion rights now even include the criminalization of pregnancy in some states, where miscarriage can be read as murder.

Feminism says it's time to reassess the judgments we make up and down the age spectrum, time to notice the woman-on-woman prejudice among us. On the back page here, a woman scrutinizes her bad behavior as a young mother, and how it feels to be on the grandmother end of things a generation later. A quiet recollection, delivering a loud message about the ways we're blind to the needs and deaf to the unspoken desires of older women.

But wait! There's also the *good* news. Lilith reports on what led to the ordination of the first lesbian rabbi out of the closet for her entire education at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Poignantly, Rabbi Rachel Isaacs chose as her rabbinic mentor Rabbi Carie Carter—a woman who, in order to become a Conservative rabbi, had to keep her sexual identity hidden for years.

Our stories pulse outward, the personal implicating the political.

The late, great New York senator Bella Abzug once suggested that women carry stickers to apply to to nonsexist ads, gender-neutral products and logos of corporations with a significant percentage of women on their boards, in order to affix to each example an announcement that "This Change Is Brought to You by Feminism." I thought about Bella when New York State passed a law this summer ensuring the right of every gay and lesbian person to get married. Feminism built the scaffolding that enabled the changes at the seminary, the changes in the state, and the changes in our personal consciousness that make for tikkun olam, a better world.

Read on!

Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: RACHEL M. SCHNEIDER

VOICES

Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

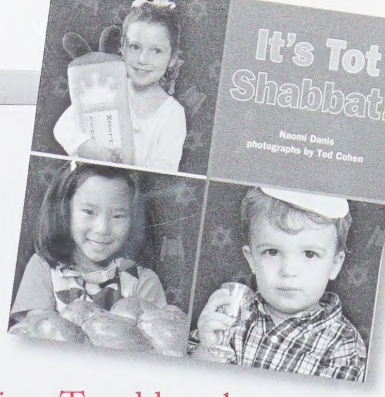
Hard to Write A Role for a Good Therapist

Yael Hedaya is the Israeli novelist who wrote the seductive female patient segments of "B'Tipul," the original Israeli TV series that became HBO's "In Treatment." She appeared this spring in New York at a screening of an episode from the Hebrew series' first season, and revealed some of her challenges. Among them: creating a script in which the therapist manages to resist the seduction. "The psychiatrist advising us on the series kept reminding me, 'He's a *good* therapist. You have to write him as a good therapist' and I wanted a less beautiful actress for the part. The actress they used was so gorgeous. No man could resist her."

The New York Times has announced that **Jill Abramson** will take over as the newspaper's new executive editor. This makes Abramson the first woman to lead the paper in its history. We have it from reliable sources that Jill Abramson is Jewish—though in her childhood home, "The Times substituted for religion," she said in the Times' story.

Susan Freudenheim, JewishJournal.com, June 2, 2011.

PHOTO: JOAN ROTH



Naomi Danis emails her editor, **Judye Groner** of Kar-Ben Books, about the line in her new children's book *It's Tot Shabbat*: "Once we read how Noah built an ark. We pretended to be the animals who came aboard. I was a porcupine."

"Lions or any other animals are fine but I feel strongly about the porcupine. It's a small, economical, and efficient way to have a bit of emotional depth. The porcupine represents a kid who feels grouchy, prickly, antisocial, not in the mood, irritated, irritating. To add to the diversities that would enhance the book, let's have at least one of the girls wear a kippah. And could there be some spilled grape juice on the table or floor? Spilled juice shows in a young child's terms that even if we are not all perfect there still is a place for us at the table. I think that's a very important Jewish idea."

Generation Roe: On the Ramparts for Reproductive Rights

The first half of 2011 has been rough for reproductive rights in the United States. In the past few months alone, the Ohio legislature allowed a fetus to "testify" in support of an anti-choice bill, Minnesota and Indiana have joined Nebraska in outlawing abortion after the 20th week of pregnancy, South Dakota politicians have decreed that women must receive anti-choice counseling before they can obtain abortion care, and Texas has not only required ultrasounds before all abortions, but mandated that doctors must describe the image to the woman, regardless of whether or not she wants to see it.

This spring also saw a vigorous push to defund Planned Parenthood. Although the measure failed on the federal level, Indiana governor Mitch Daniels has cut the organization's funding in his state, even though its clinics provide health care, cancer screening, contraception, and other non-abortion services to underserved and low-income communities. As all eyes turn towards next year's U.S. election, it seems likely that abortion will continue to hold its place as a perennial hot-button social issue.

Today, according to Medical Students for Choice, there are no providers to perform abortions in 87% of all counties in the U.S. And things may get worse, since the House of Representatives in May approved an amendment to the healthcare bill that would ban federal funds from being used to provide training for abortion procedures. As it is, again according to Medical Students for Choice, 97% of medical residents specializing in family planning, and 36 percent of OB/GYN residents, have not received training in first-trimester abortion procedures.

Abortion occupies a unique space in the public consciousness; to talk about abortion is, often, to also talk about gender, sexuality, class, race, and religion. Within Judaism, official opinions about abortion are varied, though the majority hold that abortion is acceptable—in fact, mandated—when the woman's health is in danger from a continuation of the pregnancy.

While many Jews and non-Jews would no doubt agree with that assessment, a large and loud number of legislators and their supporters have decided that it is appropriate to publicly weigh in on such a private decision. While the political winds continue to shift, the larger challenge lies in how abortion is viewed and discussed in our society. The non-partisan Guttmacher Institute estimates that one-third of American women under age 45 will have an abortion, yet the controversy, danger, and misinformation surrounding this common medical procedure show no sign of fading away. Pro-choice legislators and activists such as Gloria Feldt, now routinely use the term "abortion care" rather than "abortion rights" in order to reinforce the idea that preventing unwanted pregnancies must be part of healthcare policy.

Planned Parenthood

To talk about abortion is also to talk about gender, sexuality, class, race, and religion.

The National Council of Jewish Women (*NCJW.org*) has spoken out strongly in support of covering contraceptive services under the U.S. healthcare reform plan; both the NCJW and Hillel (*Hillel.org*), among other Jewish organizations, have reproductive-rights petitions and other action information on their websites. And while the most visible leaders of the movement came of age in the pre- and immediate post-*Roe* era, the energy and enthusiasm of younger Jewish women on both the grassroots and organizational level is encouraging—and necessary. It's often suggested that American women now, mistakenly, take their rights to a safe and legal abortion for granted, not always realizing that even treatment for infertility concerns may be among those rights curtailed if current legislative trends in the U.S. continue.

SARAH ERDREICH

Those Modern Victorian Cone Sisters

The Cone Collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art, with **Gauguin**'s "Woman of the Mango," **Picasso**'s "Woman with Bangs," and **Matisse**'s "Interior, Flowers and Parakeets," is unusual both for its magnitude and for its intimacy—so many female figures, lush interiors, coves; so many bowls of anemones.

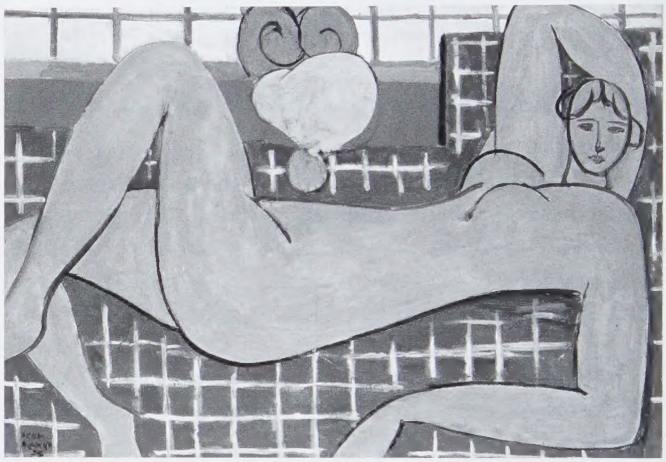
The collectors were **Dr. Claribel Cone** (1864–1929) and her sister **Etta** (1870–1949), two stout, unmarried, Victorian Jewish women who wore long skirts and petticoats and yet began acquiring "radical" and "savage" art by Picasso and Matisse at the time of the 1905 Salon d'Automne. The current exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York, "Collecting Matisse and Modern Masters: the Cone Sisters of Baltimore" (May 6–September 25, 2011), focuses on their extraordinary experiences and acquisitions.

In their lifetime, the Cone sisters amassed 3,000 objects of art which they bequeathed to the city of Baltimore: "sundry pictures, oil paintings, water colors, lithographs, colored aquatints, etchings, prints, drawings, engravings, photographs, Piper prints...also...laces, jewelry, shawls, fabrics, rugs, draperies, portiers, embroideries and other textiles, bric-a-brac, bronzes, antique furniture, marbles, sculptures, curios and other objets d'art..." The New York exhibit includes 51 artworks as well as decorative arts, jewelry, postcards, journals, account books, album photos, and a calling card from Henri Matisse. Enlarged photographs of the Marlborough Street apartments where the Cone sisters and their brother Fred lived frame the galleries. These images show the sepia quality we associate with their era (rather than the vibrant colors of the art) and the cramped quarters where their exotic treasures collided with domestic space. "...You are right, do not let things consume you..." Claribel Cone wrote in 1920 from Munich to her sister Etta in Greensboro.

The pleasure of acquisition—as Claribel Cone put it, "Ever since I was a small girl and picked up all the shells I could find, reveling in their color and in their forms, I've been acquiring beautiful things"—became prevalent in wealthy Jewish households in Europe and America even before the start of the modern period. But every collection has its own story. The Cone sisters were born into a close, prosperous, southern, German-Jewish family of 13 children (Cone Corduroy was their family business). Early on, Claribel demonstrated unusual independence and daring, choosing a career in academic medicine while Etta, more compliant and self-effacing, cared for the family household and their aging parents. In Baltimore, the two became friends with **Gertrude Stein** and her brother **Leo**. When Etta went to Europe for the first time, Leo met her in Naples and traveled with her. In Paris, she and Gertrude made the rounds of shops, galleries, and gardens together. Scholars can't agree whether Gertrude and Etta had a love relationship, but the families were thoroughly intertwined during the crucial years before World War I (and before the arrival of Alice B. Toklas).

Gertrude Stein memorialized the sisters with her enigmatic word portrait "Two Women," noting what family members, artists, and art historians have remarked: "When they were together they knew they were together" and "they were very different the one from the other of them."

FRANCES BRENT



"You are right, do not let things consume you..."

From left: Claribel Cone, Gertrude Stein, and Etta Cone sitting at a table in Settignano, Italy, June 26, 1903; Henri Matisse, Large Reclining Nude, 1935.

BY DR. CLARIBEL CONE AND MISS ETTA CONE OF BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, BMA 1950.258. ©2011 SUCCESSION H. MATISSE/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK.

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Within my home growing up in Washington, DC, my voice was honored as equal to my father's. At Shabbat dinners my father would invite political powerhouses, writers and rabbis to the table, and I was not only given permission, but pushed and encouraged to represent my own views in well-articulated arguments. I was asked to tell about Job and his struggles with G-d, or my views on Arabs and Israelis or social ethics or international politics. I was encouraged to see myself as one of the boys, as a man really.

MERISSA NATHAN GERSON

The Influencing Machine

Brooke Gladstone, cohost of NPR's "On The Media," sheds light on the reporter's life in her nonfiction book, *The Influencing Machine*.

Research points to a substantial gender gap in the way women and men approach running for office. Women have different reasons for running, are more reluctant to do so and, because there are so few of them in politics, are acutely aware of the scrutiny they draw—all of which seems to lead to differences in the way they handle their jobs once elected.

"The shorthand of it is that women run for office to do something, and men run for office to be somebody," said **Debbie Walsh**, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "Women run because there is some public issue that they care about, some change they want to make, some issue that is a priority for them, and men tend to run for office because they see this as a career path." …

Helen Fisher, an anthropologist at Rutgers, said her studies on adultery show that, at least under the age of 40, women are equally as likely to engage in it as men. She theorizes that perhaps women are simply more clever about not getting caught….

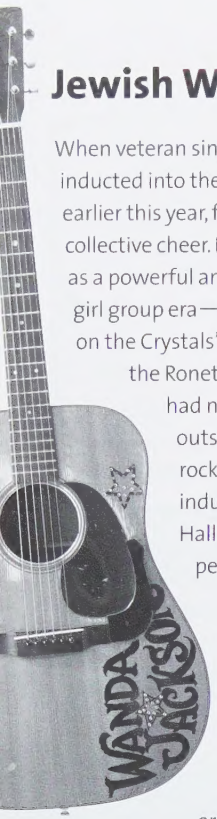
Whatever the reason, it was perhaps no coincidence that it was a woman—**Representative Allyson Y. Schwartz** of Pennsylvania—who last week became the first Democrat to call on **Anthony Weiner** to resign. Ms. Schwartz is the only female member of her state's Congressional delegation, and she says that her Pennsylvania colleagues joke and talk in a different way when she is in the room.

"Having a woman in that mix changes the dynamic," she said, "and it's actually not even subtle. It's very obvious."

Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "When It Comes to Scandal, Girls Won't Be Boys… ," the New York Times, Sunday, June 12, 2011

Jewish Women Who Rock

When veteran singer **Darlene Love** was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame earlier this year, feminist music fans raised a collective cheer. Long known to cognoscenti as a powerful and indelible voice of the girl group era—that's Love singing backup on the Crystals' "Da Doo Ron Ron" and the Ronettes' "Be My Baby"—she had nevertheless languished outside the official annals of rock. Indeed, of 619 individuals inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 55 (less than nine percent) are women.



"Women Who Rock: Vision, Passion, Power" on exhibit at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland (through February 2012), takes aim at this erasure of women's and girls' contributions to rock and roll histories, shining a spotlight on more than 70 artists, from "foremothers" like **Billie Holiday** to contemporary standouts like **Lady Gaga** and **Janelle Monae**. Billed as the world's first museum exhibit of its kind, "Women Who Rock" features a range of fascinating artifacts, from instruments such as **Wanda Jackson**'s Martin D-18 guitar to costumes—**Madonna**'s iconic gold bustier from her 1990 "Blonde Ambition" tour; a red sequined number worn by gospel-rock legend **Mavis Staples**—which shed light on how women have used self-display for artistic expression.

Jewish women turn up in unexpected places here. We learn that **Carole King** played a particularly prominent role in the 1960s girl-group era. We discover **Florence Greenberg**, a New Jersey housewife who owned and ran the influential independent Scepter label, which released hits by **Dionne Warwick** and the Shirelles. We find out about **Genya Ravan**, born Genyusha Zelkowitz in Lódz, Poland, in 1940, whose group, Goldie and the Gingerbreads, broke barriers in the 1960s when they signed with Atlantic Records, becoming the first major-label all-female band whose members played their own instruments.

And then there are the fun "who knew?" moments. Like **Bette Midler** and **Carly Simon**, **Amy Winehouse**—the English soul singer noted for her big voice and bad-girl antics—never changed her name. But **Pink** (born Alecia Beth Moore), "Mama" **Cass Elliot** (born Ellen Naomi Cohen) and **Lesley Gore** (born Lesley Sue Goldstein) all did. And who knew that indie music trailblazer **Ani DiFranco**, a professed atheist, was born to a Jewish mother? Or that **Marianne Faithful** is the daughter of a half-Jewish (on the maternal side) Viennese baroness?

Above: Bette Midler (R) with Darlene Love onstage at the 26th annual Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. Left: Wanda Jackson's Acoustic Guitar, c. 1958; Below: Madonna's *Blond Ambition Tour* Bustier, 1990.

At its heart, "Women Who Rock" is about shaking up established narratives, whether of rock and roll as an expression of masculine freedom from domesticity or of the electric guitar as a phallic instrument. The exhibit's inclusion of Jewish women is particularly refreshing given that the Jewish story in rock and roll music is so resoundingly masculine. So too does "Women Who Rock" suggest an alternative to male-centered accounts of "black-Jewish" relations. Rock and roll is in its roots an African American form, but Jewish women have been on stage and behind the scenes since its inception.

GAYLE WALD

IMAGES FROM THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME

It wasn't a humanitarian act. We simply wanted more children, and the children needed families. The do-gooder impulse should be on the back burner. We asked the rabbi not to praise us—just do the bar mitzvah. You wouldn't want your parents constantly praised for raising you."

Melissa Fay Greene, from *No Biking in the House Without a Helmet*, her memoir about her nine-child family, created by birth and by adoption.

Women almost never make one decision to leave the workforce. It doesn't happen that way. They make small little decisions along the way that eventually lead them there. Maybe it's the last year of med school when they say, I'll take a slightly less interesting specialty because I'm going to want more balance one day. Maybe it's the fifth year in a law firm when they say, I'm not even sure I should go for partner, because I know I'm going to want kids eventually.

These women don't even have relationships, and already they're finding balance, balance for responsibilities they don't yet have. And from that moment, they start quietly leaning back.

So, my heartfelt message to all of you is, and start thinking about this now, do not leave before you leave. Do not lean back; lean in. Put your foot on that gas pedal and keep it there until the day you have to make a decision, and then make a decision. That's the only way, when that day comes, you'll even have a decision to make.

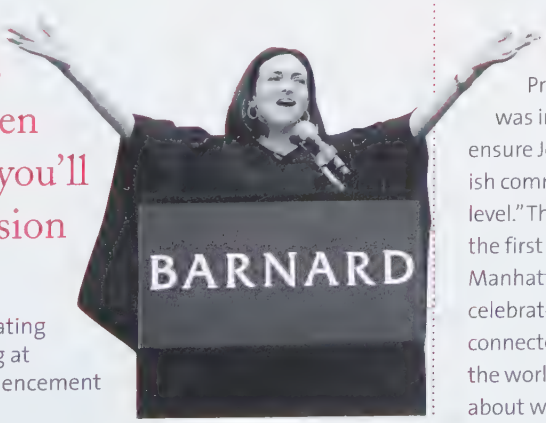


PHOTO: BARNARD COLLEGE/ASIYA KHAKI

Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, speaking at Barnard College's 2011 commencement

PHOTO: JOAN, FAITH

Cherkassy, Ukraine

When **Sheri Sandler** (L) took her daughter, **Eva** (R) to Ukraine 14 years ago on a mother-daughter trip organized by Project Kesher, they were part of a discussion on what makes a home Jewish when there is a total absence of Jewish objects. "No candlesticks, kiddush cups, mezuzahs, dancing rabbis and the like," comments Sandler. At a Shabbat in the woods, when a partial Torah scroll was presented for use during the service, "I asked if it would be okay to have it restored for the community." The Cherkassy Jews entrusted them with the object that had been the centerpiece of their religious activity, and the Sandlers restored the Torah scroll, adding a cover embroidered with the Hebrew in the feminine.

Interestingly, the restored Torah spurred several outcomes in Cherkassy. Because Project Kesher, a U.S.-based organization formed to give voice to Jewish women in the Former Soviet Union, was the facilitator of the Torah restoration, women in Cherkassy were given full access to chant and dance with the Torah in the progressive congregation there, an unprecedented egalitarian opportunity. And recently, the Torah had its Cherkassy bat mitzvah debut when **Lena Pyssina** (center), 25, Next Generation coordinator for Project Kesher, marked her bat mitzvah with it. Pyssina was in the U.S. this spring to speak about Kesher's work "to ensure Jewish women's needs are represented within the Jewish community and their voices heard at the grassroots secular level." The three women had the opportunity to meet for the first time during her visit. They were photographed at Manhattan's Rodeph Shalom congregation, where Eva had celebrated her Bat Mitzvah. "It's amazing that a Torah is what connected two young Jewish women from opposite parts of the world," Pyssina told Lilith. Sheri Sandler said, "This story is about women trying to fix and repair and restore."

THAT FIRST ALIYAH

In Which Going Up to the Torah Feels Like a Public Hanging

by Jill Shulman

WHEN SUMMER WANES and the New England leaves begin preening, my thoughts return to my spiritual moment in front of God and everyone that occurred four years ago. Back then, I had always thought of myself as "Jewish lite"—a born Jew uneducated in religious doctrine and incapable of true Jewish behavior. I attended synagogue only twice annually on the highest of holy days, where I sat in the back of the sanctuary in seats waiting accusatorily for latecomers like me. Just to put things into perspective, mine would most likely be the cell phone that rang during the rabbi's sermon.

When I moved to a new town, I intended to perpetuate my Jewish liteness. Therefore I arrived at the local synagogue I had just dutifully joined, as I'd joined but not frequented the synagogue in my last town. I slid comfortably into the back row Rosh Hashana morning, and cracked open my prayer book, forgetting, as I did annually, that the pages were numbered from back to front. I was surreptitiously flipping my prayer book around so I could read it, when all the way in the front of the sanctuary the rabbi said, "For the next *aliyah*, I'd like to ask new members to join me on the *bima*."

Of course, this did not apply to me, since I had been born a Jew, and I had already taken my rightful place in the back of the room. However someone lurking among us back-row people didn't see things my way. "There's a new member over here," proclaimed an usher standing by the entrance. As I'd entered the sanctuary he had said, "Welcome," and he'd handed me the very same prayer book that now rested correctly oriented on my lap. I turned with the rest of the crowd to see who had been outed and discovered that the usher was pointing at me.

I'd been exposed! The powers that be had caught me masquerading as a real Jew, and though I had paid my dues to this new synagogue, I in no way belonged. As penance, I walked the gangplank that was the aisle leading to the bima, then stood before an ocean of genuine Jews. Thankfully, one other woman in the sea of people had been ratted out and approached the bima, too, where someone threw prayer shawls over our shoul-

ART BY FLASH ROSENBERG

ders. It would have been a comfort, had I known at the time, that non-Jews didn't get to wear these accessories on the bima. As it was, I stood there draped in this *tallis* with my ignorant presence hiding underneath.

"*Ma hashem shelach*?" the rabbi asked me.

I stared him down, trying to telepathically convey that I didn't understand a word of Hebrew, and it worked.

"Your Hebrew name?" he translated.

I knew this one. "Yael Menucha," I said, pleased with myself for having a Hebrew name and remembering it.

"*Bat*?" he asked me.

I stared at him again, and this time the rabbi didn't need telepathy to understand that I was in need—desperate need—of translation.

"Your parents' Hebrew names?" the rabbi asked.

I had never known my parents' Hebrew names. It had been a miracle I'd recalled my own. "Jeff and Celia," I blurted, the best I could do under duress.

The rabbi inserted the names Jeff and Celia amid guttural Hebrew consonants, and then he posed the same questions to the other woman who seemed to understand what was happening better than I did.

Relieved that this aliyah business was done, I was preparing to return to the refuge of my seat in the back row (even if it was near that treacherous usher), when the rabbi muttered so the congregation couldn't hear, "Please step up to the Torah."

Say what?

He ushered us to the podium where the Torah scroll lay already unfurled, taunting me with its Hebrew hieroglyphics. Now I watched carefully as the woman beside me touched the fringe of her tallis to the parchment, kissed it, and then wrapped her hand around the wooden handle. Being not a complete imbecile, I followed her lead with the fringe touching and kissing. Had I known upon what I was embarking when I'd left my house that day, I would have skipped the lip gloss, which left a pink, sticky smudge on the borrowed fringe. (I schemed to sneak it out, launder it, and return it at Yom Kippur. I then commanded myself to stop scheming on the bima and pay attention.) It was all going okay, considering, until I accidentally latched my hand around the hand of the woman who had already claimed the nearest space on the Torah handle, at which point the rabbi gently chastised me to "Please find your own space."

Mortified, I stretched my hand as far as it would reach until it landed above hers on the handle, and there we were, two newcomers to the community who had suddenly found ourselves at what felt (to me) like a public hanging. This, apparently, was what an aliyah was all about.

I was stuck in this position, in front of God and every Jew in my new town while the rabbi chanted page after page of Hebrew. This part of the aliyah introduced a new set of anxieties. I knew I was supposed to hold onto the scroll during this interminably long Torah portion, but how was I supposed to *look*? Should the expression on my face be jubilant, as a congregant being honored? Should I look pious and repentant? Should I wave at the three people I knew in the audience? It was too late for me to cock my head and pretend that I understood the Hebrew words the rabbi read after the little question-and-answer session that had just gone down. I concluded (with no supportive evidence) that it would be safest to look serene. Of course, serenity was difficult to achieve standing in heels before an audience of strangers with my arm at an awkward angle, a renegade curl stuck to my lip gloss.

Yes, this Torah portion did eventually end, and by then one of my feet had started to fall asleep and the rabbi was privy to what lay underneath my tallis, religiously speaking. He held up a laminated card bearing transliterated Hebrew in English letter-

As penance, I walked the gangplank to the bima, then stood before an ocean of genuine Jews.

ing, so the words, though gibberish, were at least legible. When he opened his mouth, I opened mine, too, blind faith that something would emerge that would not humiliate me further. What happened next was *it*, my spiritual moment, my flicker of light!

A tune was added to the words on the card that was shockingly, miraculously familiar, and I was able to sing along. I didn't even need the card. Somewhere in the recesses of my brain, perhaps because my parents forced me to attend religious school when I was small, or perhaps because I had forced myself to attend at least the minimum services throughout my adulthood, this little Hebrew ditty had been stored, along with Cat Stevens' *Moonshadow* and the B52's *Rock Lobster*, the least kosher song I knew. I had been standing there for the entire Torah portion, for my entire *life*, dwelling on my ignorance, when this song had been inside of me all along.

In the final moments of my first aliyah, my voice, the voice of Yael Menucha singing in Hebrew, merged with the community of voices in my new synagogue, the one I had joined. The mask of serenity I'd slipped onto my face became real as I comprehended that I somehow, despite the odds, did belong. Not only had my cell phone not rung and disrupted the proceedings, but my mere presence had actually contributed in some way to the service.

I still only attend the occasional service, but now I am not shy about sitting in the center of the sanctuary. I view my first aliyah like a hazing, where I was promoted from "Jewish lite" to "Jewish medium." As I descended from the bima that day four years ago, hands of strangers reached out into the aisle, and I shook them as I marched back up the gangplank to my back-row seat. I didn't recognize any of the faces attached to those hands, but they all recognized me. After my very public spiritual moment, everyone at the synagogue knew my face, and one thing was certain. Thank God and the usher—both were starting to grow on me—I would not be considered "new" anymore. ■

Jill Shulman lives in Amherst, Massachusetts and periodically attends shul.

Out and Ordained

New York's Jewish Theological Seminary graduates its first openly lesbian rabbi.

by Amy Stone

This May, under a great white tent filling the courtyard, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Conservative Judaism's mothership, ordained Rachel Isaacs, the Seminary's first openly gay rabbinical student. The JTS policy barring gays and lesbians from applying to the rabbinical school became history. No mention was made of this milestone by JTS Chancellor Arnold Eisen or Rabbinical School Dean Daniel Nevins as they addressed graduates, families and friends. The one hint was the psalm Rachel Isaacs chose for her personal notes in the event program: "God is close to the broken-hearted and saves those whose spirits are oppressed."

After a two-decades-long reexamination of Jewish law by Conservative Judaism's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, Isaacs' ordination acknowledges both changing scholarship and societal realities. The tortuous process provides a window into how change happens in a movement that positions itself as the bridge between tradition and modernity.

When Conservative Judaism ordained its first woman rabbi in 1985, the event symbolized an opening of the rabbinic men's club as much as a reinterpretation of halakha (Jewish law). Since then, the face of the Conservative rabbinate has changed. Of the approximately 1,600 Conservative rabbis, fewer than 300 are women. More than 25 years after that first female ordination, many synagogues still want a male rabbinic leader created in the image of a male God. It seems you can ordain women rabbis, but you can't legislate an end to patriarchy.

So what will the ordination of openly gay and lesbian rabbis mean for Conservative Judaism?

The numbers will undoubtedly be much smaller than the numbers of women rabbis. Rabbinical School Dean Nevins estimated that gay and lesbian Conservative rabbis currently number no more than "a good minyan." The long-term impact may be less charged than the institutional disputes that preceded the acceptance of gay rabbis or the years of fear experienced by closeted students.

The movement's 2006 decision to ordain homosexual rabbis is a model of mixed messages. This rabbinic responsum (*teshuva*, in Hebrew) starts by reaffirming the biblical ban on anal sex between two men. But that's just the bow-to-tradition opener. Much of the heavily footnoted 20-page decision reads like a sex manual of forbidden holes. Speaking of this ruling that allowed her to become a Conservative rabbi, Rachel Isaacs said, "I blush to read it."

But the driving force in reinterpreting Jewish law is Judaism's overarching concern for human dignity. Most important: the responsum welcomes gay and lesbian Jews to apply to Conservative institutions that train rabbis, cantors and educators. It also permits lesbian and gay commitment ceremonies. This historic responsum, written by Rabbis Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins and Avram Reisner, was accepted in a 13-to-12 vote by the 25-member law committee of the Rabbinical Assembly, the professional organization of Conservative rabbis.

Shown above, this quotation from Exodus hangs over the entrance to the Jewish Theological Seminary. For the seminary, it signifies the continuity of the Jewish world and its Talmudic tradition—now centered at JTS. Photos by Amy Stone.

However, true to Conservative Judaism's commitment to both halakha and modernity, the law committee also issued two other conflicting responsa on homosexual rabbis. One, authored by Rabbi Joel Roth, reaffirms the earlier ban on homosexuality; this also passed 13 to 12. A third response, opting for the widely discredited approach of reparative psychotherapy, received six votes; this decision also holds authority. Individual congregations choose which opinion to adopt. So all three contradictory responsa stand as Conservative Judaism's positions on homosexuality—positions that could challenge even the Kama Sutra.

Following the vote, Roth resigned from the law committee, along with three other rabbis opposing gay ordination. (Roth, a respected professor at JTS, declined to be interviewed for this article, saying, "My views on the subject are clear." Ironically, Roth is also the author of the 1983 responsum opening the Conservative rabbinate to women.) Nevins was named head of the JTS Rabbinical School, signaling that the seminary was moving toward ordaining gay rabbis. And Conservative Judaism was not rent asunder.

The Conservative movement's American Jewish University in Los Angeles immediately changed its policy to welcome lesbian and gay rabbinical and cantorial students.

JTS waited three months after the law committee responsum permitting gay ordination. By then, incoming Chancellor Eisen—a sociologist, not a rabbi—had conducted a survey with sociologist Steven M. Cohen finding that the majority of 5,583 responses from rabbis, faculty, students and Conservative leaders favored ordaining gay and lesbian rabbis. In March 2007, JTS changed its policy to admit gay and lesbian rabbinic and cantorial students.

Clearly, Isaacs (see page 15) stands on the shoulders of men and women, gay and straight, who worked to overcome the seminary's deep-seated rejection of gay rabbis.

Back in the early 1990s, Jewish Activist Gays and Lesbians (JAGL) entered the seminary portals to meet with students and faculty. Miryam Kabakov, founder of the group Orthodykes and editor of the 2010 anthology *Keep Your Wives Away From Them: Orthodox Women, Unorthodox Desires*, remembers speaking at that time with both gay and straight rabbinic students.

Following JAGL, Keshet ("rainbow" in Hebrew), under Executive Director Idit Klein, broadened the goal to making not only gays and lesbians but also bisexual and transgender Jews fully part of Jewish life. Klein emphasized, "For every social issue, it's not until people can put a face, a name, a story on it that people's minds start changing."

For many at JTS, that face is Aaron Weininger, the first openly gay rabbinical candidate to enter as a first-year student under the new policy; he's on track to be ordained next year. In his first year at JTS, Weininger chaired the seminary's new Committee on Inclusion, established by the chancellor to determine what's next after the admission of gay rabbinical students. This is a far cry from the days of the Incognito Club, with gay and lesbian students throughout the seminary on suicide watch for each other during the 1991-92 law committee deliberations on homosexuality.

It's still not a totally safe world for gays. The minefield of congregational work blew up under Weininger when he was

Conservative Judaism's positions on homosexuality could challenge even the Kama Sutra.

a student rabbi. At the start of his synagogue work this past December, he came out in his opening sermon to the congregation and received a largely enthusiastic reception. Then, in April, he was barred from making his monthly visit. The synagogue president had instituted a policy giving bar and bat mitzvah families the right to keep him away the weekend of their family event, and the family with the April bat mitzvah didn't want him there.

In the mixed-message congregational world, where the majority may welcome a gay rabbi but the minority can institute anti-gay policies, Weininger was invited back for another year but declined, since it was "not a good fit."

While the rabbinical school dean now goes to bat for gay students, this recent rejection was a chilling reminder of the time less than five years ago when admitting to homosexuality meant ouster from the rabbinical school. The last dean enforcing that policy was Rabbi William Lebeau. He headed the school from 1993 to 1999 and again from 2002 to mid-2007, encompassing the periods before and just after the law committee's switch on ordaining gay and lesbian Jews. Some who were forced to lie or leave the rabbinic program say they still remember the fear of being called into Lebeau's office to be grilled on their sexuality. At the same time, Lebeau welcomed JAGL and Keshet into the seminary and credits Keshet with creating "a forum for conversation that prepared the community" for change.

Lebeau is remembered by JAGL's Miryam Kabakov as "deeply caring about the students' welfare." Nevertheless, if someone

outed a student, it was his role to investigate. On his interrogation of one woman days before her ordination, Lebeau said, "I don't think the student was pushed into an uncomfortable position. I think the student placed the seminary in an uncomfortable position by not revealing anything in her application at a time when JTS clearly stated it did not ordain gays or lesbians."

Then, suddenly, the war was over.

"The day that the decision was made that gay and lesbian students were to be accepted at the seminary," Lebeau said, "I sent the message to the student body that we would be open and welcoming. If gay and lesbian students identified themselves, they would be embraced."

Elliot Dorff, American Jewish University rector, professor of philosophy and current chair of the Rabbinical Assembly law committee, is refreshingly forthright about the untenable past. Before the policy change, he said, gay and lesbian rabbinic students would confide in him problems stemming from their closeted existence. "I'm the rector of the university, 'rabbi of the university,' the chief ordaining officer. I did not want to share the information. The deans did not want to know.... I think it was very bizarre and frankly immoral—the irony of the chief ordaining officer ordaining them. Thankfully, that has disappeared."

Dorff, whose daughter came out to him and her mother as a lesbian after the 1992 decision forbidding homosexual rabbis, says that he "predicted a long time ago that the decision to ordain gay and lesbian rabbis would be less earthshaking than ordaining women." He explained, "It will take some time for some congregations to get used to this, but we're not talking anything like the numbers of gays and lesbians compared with women. The response is a whimper, as compared with a roar."

While the numbers may be small, barring gays from the rabbinate has not just been a case of don't ask, don't tell. As Dorff put it, "The rabbinate very much involves your personal life in a way that [being] a doctor or lawyer does not. You don't want to start out your education for that role by lying about yourself."

So how will this change play out when openly gay and lesbian rabbis start applying for positions with Conservative congregations?

Chancellor Eisen considers the hiring issues that gay and lesbian rabbis will face as separate but related to the ongoing issue of the glass ceiling keeping women rabbis down. "We can't just send our students out to institutions that haven't thought this through. There are prejudices—some avowed, some unexamined." Getting at the heart of the matter, Eisen said, "We all recognize that religion is not a rational matter. There are deep psychological images of what is a rabbi—a guy with a beard. Women, on deep levels, confound that."

"There may be less bias toward gay males than straight females."

As for gay and lesbian rabbis, Eisen said, "There may be less bias toward gay males than straight females. ... If I were merely a sociologist, I'd find this fascinating, but I'm not. I don't want our students or alumni to suffer."

In a world where a gender binary has been the norm since Adam and Eve, congregations are now dealing not just with a pregnant rabbi but with the possibility of a pregnant rabbi whose partner is also female. The question of who gets to sit at the rabbinic table has expanded in a relatively short time from men-only to women, to gay and lesbian, to transgender. And the larger question is whether this change will be transformative or whether it simply reveals an increasingly open and honest seating plan—in itself a worthy achievement. ■

Amy Stone wrote the 1977 Lilith cover story "Gentlemen's Agreement at the Seminary," credited with helping overcome the Jewish Theological Seminary's opposition to ordaining women.

WHO CAN BE A RABBI TODAY?

1972 The Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) ordains Sally Priesand, America's first seminary-ordained woman rabbi.

1974 The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) ordains Sandy Eisenberg Sasso as first Reconstructionist woman rabbi.

1985 The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) ordains Amy Eilberg as first Conservative woman rabbi.

1985 RRC ordains Deborah Brin as first openly gay rabbi.

1989 HUC-JIR ordains Eric Weiss, its first openly gay rabbi.

2010 HUC ordains Reuben Zellman, the first openly transgender rabbi.

2011 JTS ordains Rachel Isaacs as its first openly gay rabbi. American Jewish University in L.A. ordained its first openly gay rabbi in 2007.

Rachel Isaacs
What a Quiet Revolutionary Looks Like

Rachel Isaacs knew by the age of 13 she wanted to be a rabbi. Awareness of her sexuality came later.

Isaacs described her coming-of-age as a lesbian: "I came out to myself around 14. I started the Gay-Straight Alliance in high school (in Freehold, NJ). At Wellesley, being gay was in no way noteworthy." Openly lesbian, when she was ready for rabbinic school, Conservative Judaism was not ready for her. Isaacs spent two years at Reform Judaism's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and transferred to the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York as soon as the school admitted openly gay and lesbian rabbinical students, in 2007.

Although Isaacs feels her ordination "represents a revolutionary moment in Jewish history," she has no desire to be the Jewish lesbian poster person. Wearing a small black yarmulke and speaking in a resonant voice, Isaacs explained, "I count myself lucky to be born in 1983. I have to pause to think about the wider implications of who I am." Simply by her gender she's challenging the patriarchy of Judaism, but, she says, "I probably take that for granted." She said, "My ultimate goal is to give Jews the resources to perform mitzvahs."

Described by JTS Chancellor Arnold Eisen as having "cognitive intelligence to burn," Isaacs seems to seek out a carefully reasoned middle ground. "There are a lot of politics at JTS," she said, "and then there was my education. I tried to keep that separate as much as the teachers did." In fact, one of her favorite teachers was Rabbi Joel Roth, the author of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards responsum opposing the ordination of gay rabbis.

Isaacs sees Judaism as "richest when there are ritual and ethical standards that challenge you—kashrut, Shabbat, affirming the centrality of Israel and that it's a mitzvah to live there." During her two years with Reform Judaism, she "never got comfortable at a synagogue with non-kosher food or HUC's showing movies on Shabbat."

The first of the new generation of openly lesbian Conservative rabbis, Isaacs chose as her mentor Rabbi Carie Carter, from the closeted generation of gay rabbinic students. A measure of how much things have changed, Carter felt able to tell Lilith that she is the author of "In Hiding," the anonymous chapter about lesbian Conservative rabbis in the 2001 book *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation*. As Isaacs' mentor, Carter blessed her and draped the ordination tallit over her shoulders in the presence of the JTS chancellor and ordaining rabbis.

Carter, ordained by the seminary in 1997, was closeted throughout her rabbinic studies. Now an open lesbian rabbi, she leads the Park Slope Jewish Center in Brooklyn, where Isaacs interned.

Not all congregations are ready for gay or lesbian rabbis, or even straight women rabbis. Of the eight women in her class of 26 rabbinical students, Isaacs is one of only three women hired for pulpit positions. She'll be a half-time rabbi with Beth Israel, a congregation of 25 families in Waterville, Maine, where she served as a rabbinic intern. Unable to afford a full-time rabbi, the congregation wanted her so much that they joined the Conservative movement to make it easier for Isaacs to serve. Isaacs will also be the Jewish chaplain at Colby College in Portland and on the faculty teaching Hebrew and Jewish theology. She is arriving in Waterville with her partner, Melanie Weiss, who holds a master's degree in Modern Jewish Studies from JTS.

As for Carie Carter's take on Isaacs' ordination: "The best part is that Rachel Isaacs, this woman who is a brilliant teacher, chose to be a rabbi, and that she got the opportunity." ■

A.S.

Unveiling

Fiction by Racelle Rosett

"MY DEAR BELOVED," IRIS BEGAN THE LETTER TO HER HUSBAND, WHO WOULD TOMORROW BE A YEAR DECEASED. "Today in *shul* I sat between my parents. I lay the blame at your feet. The feet I would entangle with my smaller, colder ones, when you were considerate enough to be yet living. I sat between them, the widow, pitiful and angry for all to see. My parents, Jerome and Rose, sat taller in their seats, relieved to think that perhaps I would be noticed, and with that their hearts unburdened.

Imagine their disappointment, that their daughter, not so pretty but pretty enough, pretty enough to have distracted you, made you flat out stupid on what became our first date, a trip to the 24 hour store in Cambridge for henna, no, cigarettes, the henna was an afterthought. But that's what we had told the children, the angels, don't get me started, so that they would not find it romantic to smoke. Imagine the disappointment of my parents that their daughter was theirs to carry once again and not just her, but also her children, who daily show their love in the form of anger. The boy, not yet ten, telling the grandfather to leave him the fuck alone and kicking him hard in the shins."

Iris Tellerman pulled her car into a space just feet from the five dollar valet, not because she was miserly like the rumor of the Jew, but because in the year since her husband died she could barely organize getting her kids to school in the morning, let alone a job. And though her husband had been smart about money and had had insurance from the union, Iris knew now, that you just don't know, and she had to be careful. The house was paid for, but there was college and now it was all on her. "I am getting my hair colored today. I know you think it is beautiful and smoldering with a touch of grey, very Anne Bancroft, but it's not about you anymore. It's about taking my photos for JDate, because Melora says that I have to. 'It's been nearly a year,' she tells me, and tomorrow is the unveiling and I could meet someone, kidding. Or not—Melora might bring a guy from work."

Stepping in the salon where Melora had made the appointment, Iris immediately felt steeped in a pleasant cynicism. She was none of the things that she needed to be to come here: not tall, not blonde, not vapid, not an actress. The man behind the desk had had his eyebrows waxed in a high arch that made him appear preternaturally interested. Iris gave him her name and continued her letter to her deceased husband.

"The receptionist informed me while I waited, that for my first visit, I was being gifted with a 20 percent discount on a Brazilian wax. This is a gift. To have the most personal hedge of all shaped into topiary. Can you imagine it? Do you? The soft triangle that was easily covered by your hand, shaped to a valentine or a landing strip or removed completely to have the nectarine smooth surface of a porn star. Is this how I should make myself over for the lawyer who was cornered by my parents in a zone defense in the lobby of the sanctuary? Would he, in our breathless removal of each other's clothing, expect to slip his hand into the front of my jeans and find, nothing? Would the down you once petted offend? So be it. If that is what is called for, I will pour hot wax on myself and wrest it away at the root. Or better, not leave my house, nay my room, but to drive the children to school or to buy their food at Trader Joe's."

In the changing room, Iris removed her t-shirt. Her breasts, she knew, were small but lovely, her body not so different than when she had gone to Camp Ramah as a teenager and been felt up by the very delicious Abram Scheinfeld, whom she thought she heard was a rabbi now in Boulder. She unconsciously cupped her breasts beneath a bra she suspected it was time to replace and was posed that way when the perpetually surprised receptionist poked his head in and told her that Namaste was ready for her, the curtain drawn around his face like he was preparing to wash that man right out of his hair.

"Namaste, formerly Susan, suggested that I do a two-step process to add lowlights for warmth and to help brighten up my face, which she informed me was washed out by the unfortunate brown I was born with. This long-overdue transformation will cost, with blow-dry and tip, two hundred and sixty dollars, paid for by Melora who staged the intervention, because 'I can't spend the rest of my life in the house with the kids.' That's what she thinks."

In the chair, Iris endured the smell of the peroxide and paged through the vacation album of Namaste and her dog Johnny Depp. He was one of the dogs now popular that were children-light and could be smuggled onto airplanes and into movie theatres like guns and popcorn, respectively. The album featured Namaste and Johnny Depp at various dog-friendly destinations: in the snow in matching down jackets, at the beach under a color wheel umbrella. They were well traveled and had plans for a visit to Nepal in the spring. Namaste and her assistant, Yzenia, guided Iris to the dryer as if she were both blind and clueless, each taking a hand. A third person, who was dressed in thigh-high striped stockings and platform Mary Janes like a saucer-eyed girl from a comic book, brought Iris a cup of Rooibus tea.

For a moment, Iris thought she might leave her body and view the scene from above like her husband would if you ascribe to the floating above things version of death. She was relieved when they left her and, under the weight of the heavy *Instyle* magazines they had piled on her lap, Iris closed her eyes and resumed contact with her beloved.

ART BY ELLEN WIENER, DETAIL FROM "COLUMN OF CLOUD", 12 X 100", OIL ON WOOD, 2007

"The children are well," she began. "We are like a small specialized unit—skilled at moving the groceries from the car to the house. Evan carries the heaviest things, like the man that he isn't, and Vered, with skill and precision, orders the couscous and macaroni boxes by height in the cabinet she makes tidy as a library. When she is done, Vered and I fold the bags and place them in a neat pile under the sink. I never have to tell them anything twice. They know it is just me, just us. We work together. I buy one special thing each for them when I shop. For Evan, it is Thai peanuts, and for Vered, fresh papaya with lime. After shopping, we snack on our treats and do homework.

"They both do their work at the dining room table and tuck the completed papers into their backpacks. They are uncomplaining and never whine. They do not dawdle or tarry like normal children. It is heartbreaking. Evan has a teacher this year who is a bastard. It is too much to tell you. He is punitive and mean and I would like to kill him with my hands. When I pleaded with him that Evan had recently lost his father, he countered that it had already been a year. I thanked him for pointing that out. I had lost track of it completely. I am teaching Evan how to deal with difficult people. The bad teacher is keeping Evan from the class trip to Space Camp because we have been late more than three times. Because there are some mornings when I open my eyes that it is too much and I have to shut them again and pull the blankets around me for a few more seconds to find my strength. Most mornings, all mornings, both children are in bed with me. It feels like we are riding a flimsy raft, but at least we are together."

Namaste put her hand on Iris's shoulder and pushed the dryer back. Iris startled; it is that rare that someone touches her. "Do you want me to do those eyebrows?" Iris raised her hand protectively. No, she thought, I'll muddle through. "No thank you," she said. Yzenia guided her to the sink and rinsed the color from her hair.

"Do you remember before you were dead?" Iris continued, "Before you were sick even, when the children were small and we drove up to the redwoods? We were in the van and both kids were asleep in their car seats and the rain was coming down so hard that they kept closing the roads behind us. And we had that Van Morrison CD on that we would play when Evan was colicky? That's all. Just that day. I go back to it all the time. When we got back to L.A., you got a pain in your shoulder you thought from playing basketball, and then it all happened like in a playbook. The diagnosis—the chemo. You know. You must have been sick already, but we didn't know. It was just our family then. It was all we ever wanted and the noise of the rain so loud outside and we couldn't see ten feet in front of us. And when we finally got there, after driving all that way, Evan and Vered refused to get out of the car to see the redwoods. They thought we were crazy and I guess we were. That is my perfect day. When I close my eyes on the mornings that are impossible, that is what I see. I can't believe you left me. I have to go. They are wrapping my head in a towel and wondering why I have tears running down my cheeks. Time for the big blow-dry."

Iris used the corner of the towel to dry her eyes and Namaste removed it like unwrapping a gift. Iris could see already that

the color was beautiful and didn't know what to make of it. She looked like she had just come out of the lake at camp, her hair falling in long ringlets. Over the sound of the dryer Namaste stage whispered, "Is this a special occasion?" Iris resisted telling her the truth: that she was preparing to go to the cemetery and reveal the headstone of her year-dead husband. That after this she had to go to Neiman's and pick up the tasteful and appropriate dress that Melora had selected for the occasion, and panty hose and shoes that wouldn't sink into the damp earth at Forest Lawn. That she would pick up her sister-in-law and her husband and kids at the airport and that the housekeeper was due to vacuum the house and put the kids' toys out of sight for the thirty or so people that would come back to her house tomorrow after the unveiling. She could see her mother already fluttering from kitchen to table, table to kitchen, interrupting her flight plan only to tuck Evan's shirt or adjust the hem of Vered's dress. If her husband were alive they would lie in bed afterward with the lights off and dish about Rose and Jerome, and his gentle laughter would make her like them better, relieved to be together in their quiet bedroom. He would bring her hand to his mouth and kiss it, and with the ease of a yawn pull her toward him, his arm hooked around her waist like a lifeguard. Iris let the warm air and the hum of the hairdryer lull her. She closed her eyes and remembered him in such detail that she caught her breath; her face flushed when she opened her eyes and saw herself in the mirror. Namaste stood back, pleased, and gave Iris a moment to take herself in. Her heart was still pounding from the dream of her husband, but it didn't alter or slow when she saw herself. A smile dawned on Namaste's face. "You see," drawing in her breath, "... beautiful." Iris brought her hand to the now cooling skin at her neck. In the mirror she saw the ring on her hand that belied that she was married to no one. Her hands moved to the sable smooth hair that cascaded down her shoulders. The room and the sounds around her receded and she felt a still quiet, like floating underwater, her heart beating hard. "How dare you," she heard herself say under the rush of sound that broke over her. Iris reached down to the floor for her purse and quickly arranged a tip for Namaste, tucking the folded twenty into a tiny white envelope and dropping it into a box that Namaste had brought back from her trip to India where it was used for donations for orphans.

The receptionist informed me that I was being gifted with a 20 percent discount on a Brazilian wax. This is a gift?

Iris walked back to her car and fumbled with the keys as if she were being followed. When she finally managed the key in the lock, the alarm blared. From a high window of the Yeshiva near where she had parked, a group of students with *payes* gazed down at her from above like a human menorah. She pressed the button again, again, again until the alarm at last silenced and the minyan receded. Iris dropped into the driver's seat and locked the door behind her. She caught her breath as if she'd made a narrow escape and laid her head back on her seat, the air escaping her lungs in a stutter. She felt her hand clench in a fist and instructed herself to release it. Her husband was dead. She had known this before. She had, after all, attended his funeral. Had sat in the room at Cedars, had pressed her dry lips to his forehead, had released him. But for him to be dead still was too much. For a moment, Iris rocked herself to the sound of her own keening. Her head dropped against the wheel and two fat tears dropped onto her lap, and with that she righted herself. She sniffed and brought the back of her hand to the corner of her eyes. She knew well that her grief was useless. Her husband, day after day, remained dead. His children were proof of this. They were already taller, the shape of their very faces had changed. They ran and on days when they might be distracted, they laughed. He was not in this world. He had left her, left them, and Iris, as widow, was a reluctant expert. What she needed most to endure this loss was to rest briefly on the wide plane of her husband's chest. She was without him and her mastery had left her only weary, only empty, only angry.

Iris felt an impatient congregation urging her on. The celebrity of her husband's death now waning, novel only to her, when, before she opened her eyes each day, it jolted her limbs. They were eager for her to shed her grief like a viscose robe trailing off her fingertips. She was meant to step into a future she did not choose and did not plan for, a future that she could barely contrive. Iris steadied herself, her hands holding the steering wheel of the parked car. "I miss you," she said, the sound of her voice soft and small. "What if tomorrow I don't unclutch the stone and lay it on your grave?" she asked, expecting no answer, "What if I refuse?" But Iris knew that tomorrow she would go and march as directed to mark the year anniversary of her husband's passing. Then, with the sun catching the warm highlights in her hair, she would take the hands of her children, first one, and then the other, walk back across the soft lawn to the waiting cars, and after washing the dust of death from her hands, head back to the house for a nosh.

Iris gathered her hair in a ponytail holder that she found in the glove box and, pulling on Evan's baseball cap, she tucked her hair away. She started the car and put it in reverse. Then, pulling forward and easing her car out of the space, she drove north on Alta Vista, half-way down shearing off completely the rear-view mirror of a parked Prius. She pulled over, gathered the broken pieces from the street and placed them in the well of the passenger seat of her car. On the back of a lunch menu from Vered's school, she wrote in handwriting that was neat and easy to read, "Iris Tellerman," with her phone number and her promise to replace the broken mirror, which she knew from the last time would be about five hundred dollars. ■

"Unveiling" is the winner of the 2011 Lilith Fiction Prize.

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PHOTO: JAMIE GRILL/GETTY IMAGES

What They Expect When You're Expecting

by GABRIELLE BIRKNER

Tube tops silk-screened with the names of heavy metal bands and "Daisy Duke" jean shorts lined display tables of the Brooklyn maternity boutique where I had gone seeking modest cover for my growing baby bump.

"Do pregnant women actually wear these?" I asked the sales clerk, holding up a pair of the barely-there cut-offs. She explained that they were very popular with local mothers-to-be, and added, without the slightest hint of irony, that they come in even shorter varieties. I thought of my own restless, swollen legs in those denim short-shorts, and I grimaced.

Making my way toward the sale rack, with its slightly more practical offerings, I thought about how far maternity wear has come. Having options other than amorphous shifts and baggy overalls is welcomed by this expectant mother—and many others, too. But the popular culture that begot skin-tight pregnancy fashions, racy maternity lingerie, "hot mom" handbooks and magazine headlines such as "Maternity Fashion Faceoff: Kate Hudson *vs.* Jessica Alba," has extended to the gestating set the pressure on women to look sexy at every stage of their lives.

As Elissa Strauss wrote recently on The Sisterhood, the Forward's women's issues blog, "Pregnancy and post-pregnancy

has, for the most part, remained elevated above the foxy ambitions that have bled into an ever-increasing range of a woman's life … during which women are now subjected to the same hot-or-not standards that used to apply only to women in their 20s."

She cited newborn onesies with cheeky sayings, such as "My mom's a fox," and "If you think I'm cute, you should see my mommy!" as evidence that pregnancy and post-partum beauty standards are changing.

Even in Jewish communities where modesty is prized, where women are expected to wear long skirts and where celebrity imagery is less pervasive, there is nuanced evidence of the "hot mom" trend. Leah Ostreicher, the owner of Generations Maternity, which caters to the ultra-Orthodox community in Borough Park, Brooklyn, said that in recent years even the modest pregnancy fashions she specializes in have become more fitted.

When she first began selling maternity wear in the community 20 years ago, she said, the guiding principle was "the bigger the better," with Orthodox women favoring tent-like trapeze dresses; today, she said, more often they opt for pencil skirts and tank tops worn over long-sleeve shells. Not exactly tube tops and short-shorts, but an evolution nonetheless.

"Over the past five or 10 years, the ultra-Orthodox community has embraced pregnancy as a time to be sexy and feminine," said Chaya Tamir, a 28-year-old Lubavitch mother of three, in Miami. "So you're seeing more belly-hugging pieces and tighter clothes—pieces that celebrate what your body is doing."

As a result, Tamir said, like their less religious counterparts, more Orthodox women are carefully watching the scale throughout their pregnancies.

Until recently, pregnancy provided "an exemption from looking like a supermodel," Jordana Horn told Lilith. She is a New Jersey mother, expecting her third child this summer, who has been chronicling her pregnancy on various parenting blogs. "Now, it's very different."

Horn blames the past decade's celebrity baby boom, which continues to be a major source of fodder for tabloid titles and gossip websites. "It tires me out just to flip through the magazines," she said, "let alone to go to the gym for enough hours to look that good." She said that, for the duration of her pregnancy, she has sworn off the magazines that insist on fetishizing celebrities' perfectly rounded, out-in-front bumps.

Watching celebrities put on baby weight and shedding it has become a "media sweet spot," said Rosie Pope, host of the Bravo series "Pregnant in Heels." Onscreen and off, Pope, who is also a high-end maternity wear designer, assists expectant parents with all of their pre-baby "needs"—as in, one client *needs* to be photographed nude on her horse; another *needs* a panel assembled to come up with the perfect brand name for her third child.

Pope said she encounters a lot of women who obsess about their weight (and their fitness routines) during pregnancy. "I keep reminding them that all of the changes are happening because they are becoming a parent—and there's a healthy amount of weight they need to gain for the sake of the child," she said. "It's nature's way of telling parents, 'You don't come first anymore'. If you can't handle that, you may want to rethink becoming a parent."

She also said sees many women set unrealistic timelines for losing their baby weight. And they find themselves, almost inevitably, disappointed—or embracing unhealthy weight loss techniques. The New York Post recently dubbed this trend "mommyrexia." Pope tells her post-partum clients that the celebrities they see walking the red carpet, or

MATERNITY CORSET (1917), VIA PERIODPAPER.COM; SEARS MATERNITY SHOP, AUGUST 1991 COVER OF VANITY FAIR, VIA WIKIPEDIA.ORG

even the catwalk, weeks after giving birth likely have teams of people—trainers, nutritionists, chefs—helping them get their pre-baby bodies back. Of course, most women cannot expect to lose within a matter of weeks all of the 25–35 pounds that the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists now recommends that healthy women (carrying a singleton) gain during the course of their pregnancy.

Rabbi Alison Adler suggests another approach. A spiritual leader at Congregation Mishkan Israel in Hamden, Connecticut, and a trained psychotherapist who teaches about Jewish understandings of food and body image, she recommends prayer as a way to bring the focus back to "how miraculous it is that our bodies are doing this, and that includes getting rounder. I always come back to the blessing of *Asher Yatzar*, which thanks God for opening the body when it is supposed to open and closing it when it is supposed to close." *Asher Yatzar* is the prayer that many observant Jews recite each time they go to the bathroom, but Adler thinks it's particularly well-suited for pregnancy and childbirth.

Until recently, pregnancy provided "an exemption from looking like a supermodel."

For some, health concerns are behind some of the emphasis on pre- and post-natal aesthetics, said Jessica Denay, the author of the 2010 book *The Hot Mom to Be Handbook*. Denay contends that the sexy-while-pregnant phenomenon may actually be promoting healthier lifestyles. "Years ago people used pregnancy as an excuse to binge on ice cream, to eat whatever they wanted," she said. "If they now say, 'I want to fit into that cute outfit, so I'm going to put down the Devil Dog, and pick up an apple or a pear', guess who benefits from that? The baby."

For her part, Deborah Kolben, the editor of the Jewish parenting website Kveller and the mother of a toddler daughter, questions the backlash against "hot moms." "There's no reason women shouldn't feel beautiful and sexy when they're pregnant; there's no reason they should have to hide themselves behind ugly, shapeless frocks," she said. "Does it sometimes go too far? Sure. Does that make it all bad? No."

The trend can, of course, reach destructive and narcissistic extremes—when women are eternally conscious of the gaze of some "other" every day of their lives. And yet, despite the extremes, and even despite some of the recent articles indicating that pregnant women fear losing their husbands—or at least their husbands' attention—if they don't drop back to their pre-pregnancy shape immediately, the phenomenon of "hotness" during pregnancy holds an empowering message of liberation. Liberation from the pregnancy-hiding politics of the maternity muumuu, and liberation from the illogical idea that a woman's identity as an expectant mother means a total subversion of her identity as a sexual being.

But that doesn't mean I'll be buying those Daisy Dukes any time soon. ■

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Mid-20th Century

In 1952, Lucille Ball was the first woman to show her pregnancy on TV. Rather than "pregnant," she was refered to as "with child."

In this Sears catalog, maternity wear is modeled by non-pregnant women, a trend that continued until the 1980s.

And Now...

The August 1991 cover of Vanity Fair reformed how we see pregnancy in society—especially among celebrities. "More Demi Moore," photographed by Annie Leibovitz, has become iconic.

Timeline compiled by Hanna Sender.

The Difference Between Them

Fiction by Janice Weizman

ART: SHOSHANNA GIVON, FROM "SERIES" "MIRIAM IS YOUR BELOVED DAUGHTER." IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

MOSHAV B'NEI GILAD, FEBRUARY 1966

It was common knowledge among the Jews of Sadjan that Mazal, the youngest daughter of the Zandani Silversmiths, had sharp eyes. Not sharp like old Shama's, which could discern fortunes by squinting into coffee grounds splayed across the sides of her chipped cups, but eyes that could look at a thing and perceive, like light seeping through the thinnest of cracks in a mud wall, a forecast of salvation or doom. Once, when Mazal was still a girl, her father considered that those sharp eyes might be an indication of a quick mind, and in a moment of playfulness, opened his book of *tehilim* and pointed out the first letters of the Hebrew alphabet. But when several days later he found her probing a page of his *tanach* for alephs and bets, he feared that he had made a regrettable mistake. "Mazal's sharp eyes are more a burden than a blessing," he complained to Rabbi Sa'adia. "If she sees too well, who will want her for a wife?" Nonetheless, two weeks short of her fifteenth birthday, Meir Ka'atabi, the shoemaker's son, was found to be more than willing. In a year's time, when Mazal spotted the two light skinned westerners with odd clothes and cropped hair knocking on Rabbi Sadia's front door, she was pregnant with her oldest daughter, Tehila. Peering over the top of her courtyard gate, she noted how the Rabbi embraced the men and led them into his home. "Those two have come take us to the land of Israel," she told her husband; and sure enough, not six months passed before the entire family had been uprooted and transformed into a clan of impoverished immigrants, living off ration cards in a leaky tent at the *Masmia* immigrant camp.

This morning, eight children plus a new pregnancy later, Mazal's sharp eyes still see plainly when trouble is coming. She's standing out by her front gate, watching Shlomi, her youngest, collect oranges from the orchard across the way. A light rain is falling, and the long, dark braid that descends down her back has gone frizzy and damp, but just as she's about to go back in, she spots Eli, the mailman working his way down the muddy

street. Though he's still several houses away, she can see a plain brown envelope with heavy black writing. And everyone knows what that means. A shudder, cold as a damp winter wind, passes through her.

"Good morning Madam," Eli calls out in his Morrocan accent as he approaches. He hands her the brown envelope and grins. "It looks like your Tehila is going to be a soldier."

"My daughter will be no such thing," she snaps, snatching the envelope from his hand. "Shoshana Grafi is setting her up with a housekeeping job at Sorroka hospital. She's starting there the minute she finishes school."

"Too bad. Tehila would make a great officer," he teases. "Won't you at least show her the summons?"

Mazal doesn't respond immediately to this provocation, but rather scowls thoughtfully as she crosses her arms atop her belly. No respectable daughter of a Yemenite family shames herself by enlisting. A girl who goes off to the army invites disaster. It's stupidly dangerous, like riding horses, or swimming in the sea. And even if she manages to come out body and soul intact, who would want her? "No daughter of mine is going to be a soldier," she calls out as Eli moves on to Yihye Nagar's house next door. "The army will just have to find some other girl."

Though she has tried to raise Tehila to be decent and modest, Mazal fears that in the ruthless struggle between the righteous and honorable ways of the past and the cheap dazzle of New Ideas, the righteous and honorable are losing. Not long ago she opened the bathroom door to find Tehila swirling before the mirror in one of those horrible short skirts that the Rabbi speaks against so vehemently. The family radio, perched on a corner of the bathroom sink, was blasting out an offensive tune while Tehila sang along, her hips bouncing like a lewd dancer's, her legs thin and bare, and an unfamiliar flash of invitation lighting up her dark eyes. "Oh!" Tehila screamed in surprise, rushing to dim the noise. Mazal could only stare, speechless and mortified, until she managed to ask, "My daughter, what are you doing?"

No respectable daughter of a Yemenite family shames herself by enlisting. It's stupidly dangerous, like riding horses, or swimming in the sea.

Clearly, what the girl needs is a husband. Though she swears that she won't enlist, Mazal has seen the way she watches the female soldiers at the Thursday market. She studies them, from the green army caps, to the stripes and patches sewn into their sleeves, down the length of their army skirts, to the mannish black shoes on their feet, as they sort through piles of colored hair clips and bottles of bright nail polish.

Turning the envelope over in her hands, a sharp memory comes into focus; Zohara, a fragment from the life that was once hers in Sadjan, rises in her mind. Zohara's mother, Nadra, was raped at fourteen by a Moslem tax collector. No one wanted her after that, and it was no surprise to anyone that she soon became a whore. They lived in a mud hovel on the far side of town. In the evenings, Nadra would open her courtyard gate and sit in the public view, dressed in purple robes, smoking a *nargila*. She lined her eyes with kohl and colored her lips with bright red lipstick. In her raspy voice she would call out to passersby with bold words and ugly laughter. From earliest childhood Mazal was forbidden to go near.

When the girls and women of Sadjan would gather in the afternoons to mend clothes or repair baskets, Zohara was never welcome. When they would meet at the village well, clay jugs balanced firmly on their shoulders, they would ignore her when she spoke. And at the henna celebrations for brides, when they pressed red mud into each other's palms, they would turn their backs to Zohara, so that she would know that on account of her mother, she was not welcome in the circle of the respectable.

Now, thirty years later, Mazal feels her heart sway in remorse. Yet the tradition teaches that a Jewish woman lives in honor. And who better than the daughter of a whore to teach the daughters of respectable women the difference between them? Zohara, by a pitiless turn of fate, was doomed. Even if she cried and prayed each night, God was always far away. The Rabbis speak of rewards and punishments, but Mazal knows what she sees: in this world, there is no reward and no punishment; only fickle destiny, lying in wait and ready to pounce like a thief in the road.

How is it that even as she gazes out on the green fields and bright orchards, watching their colors grow clear and sharp in the rain, Mazal's thoughts are with the hot and dusty streets of Sadjan? Shlomi calls to her, his small arms struggling to clasp the fat oranges. The envelope is getting wet, the army logo dissolving into a black swirl. As she heads out to the orchard, she lets it slip, slimy as a worm, into the garbage pail by the gate. ■

Janice Weizman has lived in Israel since 1985. She is a graduate of the Shaindy Rudoff program in creative writing at Bar Ilan University, and the managing editor of the program's literary journal, Ilanot. *Her writing has appeared in the online journal* Scribblers on the Roof. *She is completing work on a historical novel.*

Ruth Langer

Swimmers Against the Tide

Girl Athletes Who Broke the Boundaries, Broke the Records, and Broke Free.

by Karen Propp

This July, the European Maccabiah Games were held in Vienna, marking the first time that Jewish athletes from dozens of nations competed on a territory of former Nazi Germany. It's a fitting moment to celebrate a group of exceptional Jewish girls who were exultant champions over 70 years ago as Hitler's reign approached. They were the Hakoah Vienna women's swim team, a group of athletes whose sports prowess was equaled by their political courage.

My mother, too, was a girl in Vienna during these years, and my grandfather a Hakoah soccer player. Inspired by the swimmers' story, which I initially learned of from Yaron Zilberman's 2004 film documentary, "Watermarks," I interviewed some of the "Hakoah Girls" in Vienna, London and the United States. In their eighties and nineties, these remarkable women were still vital and energetic, sharing details from their iconic girlhoods as though little time had passed.

Their story begins in 1924, when 15-year-old Hedy Bienenfeld dove into the Danube canal and breast-stroked to first place in the annual, five-mile *Quer durch Wien* ["Across Vienna"] as half a million spectators watched fzrom the river banks. Exercise—for amusement and for the sake of one's health—had become very fashionable, and swimming was one of Austria's favorite sports. Unlike other athletic events, the open-air race down the Danube had no entrance requirements; anyone, even Jews, could compete. When precocious Hedy secured second place the following year, and teammate Fritzi Loewy free-styled to first, the Hakoah swimmers became players in the close, competitive world of Viennese sports.

The Hakoah Vienna Sports Club was founded in 1909 in response to the "Aryan clause," which restricted Jews from joining sports clubs. From the beginning, its mission was three-fold. First was to promote Zionism, particularly Max Nordau's "muscular Judaism," which aimed to subvert stereotypes of Jews as frail shopkeepers and pale scholars. Second was to strengthen community bonds and Jewish identity, particularly among largely assimilated Jewish youth. And third was to enter the then-burgeoning movement of competitive sports. The Hakoah soccer team, still legendary among soccer aficionados, was avant-garde in hiring professional coaches, and the swim team followed suit.

Hedy and Fritzi were blazingly modern girls. Gorgeous, gregarious Hedy became famous not only as a swim

On left, Hedy Bienenfeld modeling a swimsuit which was au courant in 1928. Hedy and her husband (and former swim coach) Zsigo Wertheimer moved to the United States after World War II. When he died, in 1969, Hedy moved back to Vienna. A well-off widow thanks to Zsigo's business acumen, Hedy was able to assist her old teammate Fritzi financially. When Hedy was stricken with breast cancer, Fritzi helped with her care.

Below, Fritzi Loewy (left) and Hedy Bienenfeld (right) in 1927. Both women won a bronze medal at this second European Swimming Championship—the first time that women were allowed to participate. Temperamental opposites and swimming rivals in their youth, towards the end of their lives, they became close friends. Neither woman had children. Notice the little toy dog at their feet.

PHOTOS COURTESY MACCABI WORLD UNION ARCHIVE, JOSEPH YEKUTIELI MACCABI SPORTS ARCHIVES. OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

champion, but as a fashion model for Vienna's leading magazines, supporting herself financially while still in her teens. After many lovers and beaus, she married the swim coach—Zsigo Wertheimer—a charismatic and gifted mentor 10 years her senior. Confident, bohemian Fritzi, reportedly bisexual, often sported a pet monkey on her shoulder. She carried on an affair with Dr. Valentin Rosenfeld, the director of the Hakoah swimming division, whose psychoanalyst wife, Eva Rosenfeld, was a member of Anna Freud's inner circle. Because Dr. Rosenfeld, a lawyer, took on only penniless clients such as the Communist party, Eva supported the family by running a school in her garden, where the young Erik Erikson was a teacher.

By the early 1930s, Zsigo Wertheimer and Valentin Rosenfeld had become deeply and single-mindedly committed to building a star team from a second generation of swimmers. That a group of talented teenagers who loved the water could be trained by professionals in a systematized and rigorous way to excel was then a brand-new concept. The swimmers practiced several days a week after school and on weekends at the Dianabad, a pool housed in an elegant building bordering the Danube and the Jewish quarter. They were a close-knit group whose energetic lives included parties, galas and balls, as well as hikes in the countryside and lectures by cultural figures—including one enlightened physician who delivered the astonishing news that, contrary to popular belief, females did not have to

The Hakoah girls were known particularly for winning relays, where their easy interdependence assured success.

An Austrian newspaper circa 1928 that reflects society's uneasiness with women venturing outside traditional occupations such as typist or seamstress. Typically, women's participation in sports at that time was seen only as preparation for marriage and motherhood. The title here translates, "Athletes in Civil Life." The text accompanying photo #1 reads: "One mustn't believe that our female sports stars only do well in sports. Whoever may have harbored this suspicion is hereby strikingly refuted. Fritzi Loewy, master in swimming, achieves notable speed on the typewriter as well."

The text for photo #5 reads: "Lovely Hedy Bienenfeld, record-holder in swimming, claims in all earnestness to be able to cook."

take to their bed during menses. In the summer, girls and boys took up residence at Zsigo's rigorous training camp at Lake Worthersee, a magical place where friendships deepened and romances blossomed, creating the lifelong memories universal to overnight summer camps.

Success, however, was always political. As the Jewish girls increasingly triumphed in the pool they engendered overt anti-Semitism. Hunky teenage boys from the Hakoah wrestling team accompanied the girls to away games, ready to step in should the tension erupt in raised fists. Coaches from rival, Nazi-sympathizing teams, disputing Hakoah's win in a race, devised faux penalties and regulations that Hakoah coaches then worked to trump with elaborate arguments.

In 1935, the Hakoah swimmers competed in the second Maccabiah Games, held in Palestine, then a largely impoverished land of desert, and clearly an exotic adventure for the young cosmopolitans. The Hakoah girls led the opening parade through Tel Aviv while "pioneers" ecstatically cheered the arrival of 1350 Jewish athletes from 28 countries; soldiers from the British Mandate looked on. The swimmers triumphed in the newly built pool by the sea in Bat Galim, garnering the points that placed Austria first. Germany placed second. They toured the land on motorbike, waved to Bedouins on camels, boarded with *chalutznik* families, and returned to Vienna ardently Zionist.

In the cohort of swimmers that came of age after Hedy and Fritzi, three particularly exceptional Hakoah girls—Judith Deutsch, Ruth Langer and Luci Goldner—were chosen to represent Austria at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Talented Ruth, 15, the youngest of the three Olympic hopefuls, initially took up swimming because it was an arena where her more academically successful brother did not venture, while Luci, the backstroke champion, eclipsed her athletic brother.

But the drumbeat of Nazism had begun to sound, and Judith especially—the star

Swimmers at Portschach on Lake Worthersee, Austria, at Zsigo Wertheimer's training camp. Note the charming placement of the Hakoah emblem on the male Hakoah member.

Palestine, 1935. Hakoah swimmers modeling the hats they donned in the Maccabiah Games' opening parade. The white triangles in the background are the desert tents of early Zionist pioneers.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MACCABI WORLD UNION ARCHIVE, JOSEPH YEKUTIELI MACCABI SPORTS ARCHIVES

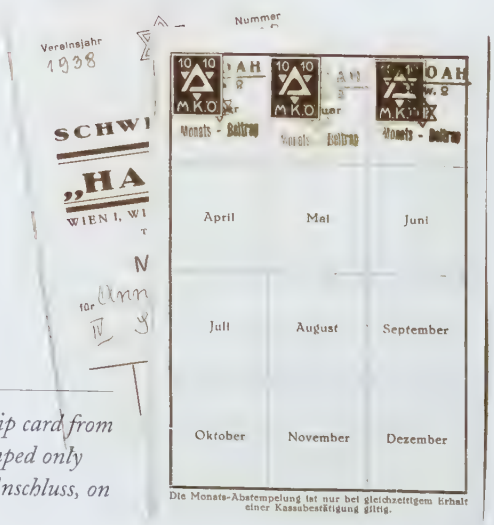
who set 12 national records in one year and received Austria's highest athletic award—had to make an intensely personal decision that weighed ambition and drive against moral courage. Within the context of a heated international debate about whether attending the Olympics was tantamount to supporting Hitler's Germany, the three champions announced in the press their painful and prescient decision to boycott the Berlin Games. This was not an obvious choice at the time. Few athletes, Jewish or not, joined the boycott. Austrian officials swiftly retaliated by issuing a ban that forbade the three women from competing ever again and stripped them of their titles. In 1995, when the Austrian government apologized and reinstated the champions' records, Judith, Ruth and Luci—who had settled respectively in Israel, England and Australia—refused invitations to go to Vienna for the ceremony.

When in March 1938, Germany took Austria in the Anschluss, the Gestapo ransacked the Hakoah offices and closed swimming pools to Jews. Perhaps Hakoah's greatest institutional victory was its commitment to getting thousands of its members safely out. Dr. Rosenfeld, who fled to London, organized tirelessly to match over 100 swimmers, and often their families, to countries with opportunities for refugees.

Some of these girls' families had never been keen on their daughters' unladylike preoccupation with competitive swimming, and some upper-class families had disapproved of Hakoah's ideological leveling of social class. In the end, though, these feisty, progressive girls were responsible not only for breaking barriers as females and as Jews, but they also became, in many cases, the young agents of their families' survival. ■

Karen Propp is the author of two memoirs and co-editor of Why I'm Still Married: Women Write Their Hearts Out on Love, Loss, Sex, and Who Does the Dishes. *She is writing a young adult novel based on the lives of the Hakoah girls.*

Above, Coach Zsigo Wertheimer with the most successful Hakoah Vienna swimmers. From left: Judith Deutsch, Hedy Bienenfeld, Fritzi Loewy and Luci Goldner. The single portrait on right is Deutsch who, in 1935, held every Austrian women's middle- and long-distance freestyle record. In 1938, she left Austria for Palestine, where she married a Hakoah hockey player. At the end of her life she lived in Herziliya, across the street from her sister Hanni, also a Hakoah swimmer.



A Hakoah swim club membership card from 1938. Note that the card is stamped only for the first three months. The Anschluss, on March 13, ended everything.

PHOTOS COURTESY MACCABI WORLD UNION ARCHIVE, JOSEPH YEKUTIELI MACCABI SPORTS ARCHIVES. MEMBERSHIP CARD FROM THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF ANNEMARIE PISKER (PICK), LONDON.

Our Brothers/Ourselves

BROTHERS. They can take center stage and leave us to figure out what's left. Or give us center stage, or share. Or leave us to grieve. Or leave us. Or ask us to marry them.

BROTHERS. They shape who we are. Are they younger or older? Sweet or troubled? Protective or ruthlessly competitive? Brilliant, privileged, absent. The answers become us.

BROTHERS and SISTERS. The Bible gives us very few of these dyads; Moses and Miriam stand out lovingly. Feminist authors, focused on sister sibs, have left the brother-sister pairs almost untouched.

BROTHERS. Let's take five. An adored baby brother whose life takes a polarizing twist. A venerated big brother who venerates in return. A rejecting brother who will become his sister's ward ... but let's not think about that yet. A sandwich of brothers who create, with their sister, something that holds up a house.

Here, four sisterly takes.

The author, 12, with her brother, 4. Tel Aviv, 1968.

My Brother, Missing

by Tehila Lieberman

My brother doesn't age. He stares back at me from a stamp-sized photo on the poster I have spent the last 10 years avoiding. To his right is a teenage girl lost to an explosion on a seafront promenade, to his left an army reservist whose jeep took a deadly wrong turn. The sixth victim of the second intifada, my brother went missing near Elon Moreh on October 7, 2000, and was found in a cave near Nablus on October eighth. He was 36. Time has sped past him. Now he has three sons-in-law he's never met, three grandchildren and another two on the way.

The picture of him is almost iconic. His tallit is draped over his head, a beatific smile on his face. As a rabbi's son in search of his own path, he refused to take the final step to becoming a rabbi, but death conferred that title upon him nonetheless. After one headline declared Rabbi Hillel Lieberman to be dead, the others followed suit.

The designation was meant to express respect, but he was not a rabbi. He was a teacher, a yeshiva student, a settler, and for a time, a shepherd who argued with his wife to allow the sheep into the house. Here she drew the line. He took on as his

spiritual work and life-purpose guarding and studying at the controversial seminary at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, attended mostly by those from the cluster of settlements overlooking that city. He didn't survive the Palestinian rage that sent black smoke from the tomb high into the sky on that October day, a week after the intifada erupted and the Israeli army withdrew from protecting the area. The only explanation conjured by the papers for why he was nearby was that perhaps he was heading to save the Torah scrolls, not knowing that they'd been evacuated. But this we'll never know.

Where did we begin, my brother and I? On a May night in 1964 when I was eight, my sister seven, and our parents brought him home, chubby, cherubic and red from an as yet undiagnosed allergy to wool. Finally, a boy. My sister and I did not yet apprehend the adulation, the rush of expectations gathering around him. Nor were we at an age to appreciate the meaning, eight days later, of the swelling crowd attempting to enter the house for the bris, the waves of which literally expelled us onto the street.

If it is not easy to be the rabbi's daughter, it is all the more fraught to be the rabbi's son.

If it is not easy to be the rabbi's daughter, it is all the more fraught to be the rabbi's son. My brother was born at the height of my father's career, when he served as rabbi of one of Brooklyn's Syrian shuls, and also as headmaster of a prominent yeshiva high school. With my parents juggling multiple constituencies and my mother needing to be at my father's side, my brother often came under my care, and I loved him deeply. It would be an exaggeration to say that, until I left for Israel when he was 10, I was his surrogate mother, but it was clear that I was very much his emotional anchor. Later, as he was beginning to chafe beneath the intensifying expectations, my secular music, friends and community were his refuge. He shared my love for rock-and-roll and let his auburn hair grow to reach his shoulders.

When my father had his first heart attack, for several days Hillel didn't come home. Shortly thereafter he changed direction. Just as I was returning to the States, he moved to Israel, joined the army, and then immediately took on my father's ultimate unfulfilled dream: he began to build his homestead and a family of nine in a settlement on the West Bank.

From the maelstrom of our very public lives and particular family dynamics, the two of us had scattered with vertiginous force far from Brooklyn. I flew to the outfields of the possibilities, at first living a secular life in Jerusalem, then becoming a writer in Boston, marrying a Latin American musician, embracing an ever more diverse world, and living in Cambridge as though in a safe house. My brother became increasingly more religious, surpassing even my parents in the rigors of kashrut, and living in a trance of settler politics and religion that to him were inseparable.

If I had once taken care of him, he now wanted to take care of me. He saw my choices as filled with peril, and where once I had been his beacon, he hoped to be the one to spring my return to the Orthodox path. He cajoled, he joked, he wrote long letters with parables, he brought me in front of a mystic in Jerusalem who, analyzing a mezuzah scroll that had been in my hand for a minute, shook his head gravely, and said, "Tsk, tsk." I think we both knew the effort was doomed. But even while our political views and spiritual choices were careening ever farther from one another, we loved each other deeply.

A friend of the family who dabbled in kabbalistic interpretation said to me at one point, "It's not good that the two of you were named for the same person [our grandfather Hillel Lieberman]. That shouldn't have happened." As if somehow we had to split some life-force meant for one person alone. As if only one of us could remain. But I refused then, and refuse now, to take on that kind of thinking.

I miss my brother profoundly. His absence has limned a place in me, hollow and forever literate in grief. I would gladly put up with the fraught and unfinished conversation about my soul if I could have him back in body.

For many of the last 10 years, late at night, I have come back to that hour that changed everything—when Hillel heard that Joseph's Tomb was on fire and left his synagogue, to walk towards it. Night after night, ever the older sister, I'd run a few steps behind him, yelling *stop stop. A life can be made of the small stuff, too. Don't take on this mantle of tragedy. Don't bequeath it.* Other nights I chase after him asking what will likely never be answered. *Why?*

The decade has not provided answers. But the questions have quieted. We were separate travelers. He would have loved to save me from a life he considered dangerously secular. And I would have loved to save him from his fate. But we were helpless in the face of both tasks.

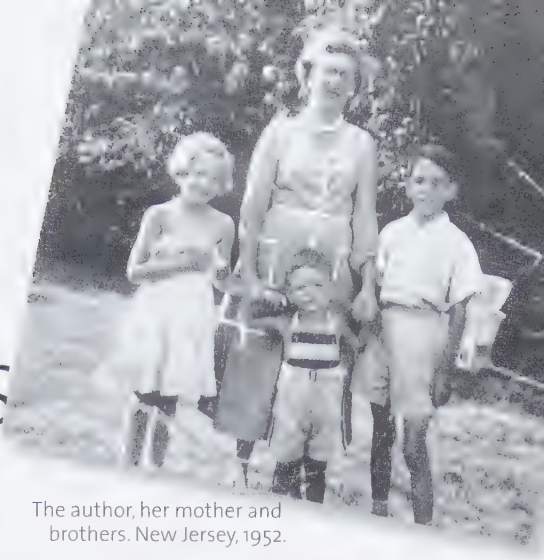
If some essence of him persists, my sense is that he is no longer tracing the path to the tomb. He is no longer calculating the seconds to his ambush or walking toward the billowing smoke. I imagine him sitting on one of the hills, his eyes turned toward his stone house where his children's weddings are being planned, their new babies named and feted.

Now when I imagine catching up to him on those rugged, controversial hills, it is a different question that begins to take form. *Okay*, I say. *Okay. Now where do we go from here?* ■

Tehila Lieberman, an award-winning fiction writer, has been published in Salon.com, Nimrod, the Colorado Review and Salamander, among other journals. She is completing a novel entitled The Last Holy Man.

The Firstborn and the Princess

by Gloria Jacobs



The author, her mother and brothers. New Jersey, 1952.

It's 1953. America is in a boom economy—people buying everything, discovering shopping as a hobby. My mother, my two brothers and I move into public housing. There is no car, the closets have no doors, we buy our clothes at John's Bargain Basement. My mother works two jobs: by day she's a comptometer operator, typing numbers on a mechanical calculator; once a week she cooks hot dogs for Bingo Night at a synagogue. My grandmother lives with us, to take care of us, but in many ways my brothers and I raised ourselves. *The smart, Jewish wild children of the projects.*

It is all comparative. Sometimes we are the studious geeks of the neighborhood (since most of the kids around us have little encouragement to study), but my brothers are also effortlessly daring. With their chemistry sets, they build a volcano in the toilet bowl which "erupts" with greater force than they expect and cracks the bowl. They build a stink bomb that burns the median on the road, bringing out fire engines. They will become highly accomplished scientists. Being "the girl" in the family, my risks are more social. I sneak out at night to hang out on street corners, and my brother Joey covers for me. I date non-Jews in black leather jackets and make sure they pick me up from Hebrew school so the rabbi will tell my parents. The three of us watch one another do things we shouldn't, sharing the conviction that taking risks is good.

In many ways, in the projects, we raised ourselves.

We spend weekends with my father—dipping into his life is like dunking into icy water at the beach: exhilarating, daunting, intense. I idolize his eccentricities, which are really psychosis. Mark tries to protect our father from himself. Joey wants to get on with things, not have this always be so central. I am fascinated when my father fixes lunch for us in his backyard by placing sliced potatoes on a rock and aiming a magnifying glass at them; Mark wants to be sure my father doesn't burn himself; Joey wants a real lunch.

My father in his madness becomes religious, and one of his fiercest obsessions is with the biblical patriarchs and the role of the firstborn son. There are two sons, but it is the firstborn son who counts. My father says "Mark, the firstborn son" as though the epithet were Mark's middle name. The firstborn son gets first choice in everything, gets to decide for the other two. When I propose that we all do something on a day we are visiting, my father replies, "Let Mark decide, since he is the firstborn son." It infuriates me every time.

2004. It is my mother's 90th birthday. I make a speech about the sacrifices she made raising three brilliant children with their many advanced degrees, about how many hours she worked, never letting us feel we were a burden or truly poor; how if we asked for something, she would find a way, never saying no. Mark stands up after me and says, "She never said no to *some* of us," meaning me. I am stunned: Did *they* not get everything they asked for? When I wanted a dress from Lord and Taylor's for eighth-grade graduation, she bought it; in high school I got the camel jacket with a fox collar; the summer I was 15, some of my friends joined a swim club in the suburbs, and yes, she even found the money for that. The luxuries she never had. But my brothers? Did they care that all their clothes came from John's Bargain Basement, that they didn't go to swim clubs? Did they ask for things and not get them, or just not ask? And, really, how could I not have noticed?

Mark and I battled our way through childhood. He once threw a knife at me (it missed). We didn't speak the entire year before he went to college. And then we became friends. He brought books home for me to read, taught me how to change the oil in a car. It took decades for me to see what had been going on: the Firstborn and the Princess, battling for advantage, while Joey watched it all, loved by all, rarely making waves. It's a family. Not Ozzie and Harriet, but a normal family, like all things become normal when you live them. And there was something else, an intense empathy driven by the desire to protect both parents, to spare them, burdened as they already were, from seeing the raggedness of our growing up.

You don't plan on raising kids this way, but now, more than 40 years after leaving our mother's home, we three have links that I'm convinced are more powerful than most siblings'—links created by poverty, love, competition, eccentricity, deprivation and madness. It's not ideal. But it's pretty good. ■

Gloria Jacobs is the executive director of the Feminist Press at CUNY and the former executive editor of Ms. magazine. She is the coauthor with Barbara Ehrenreich and Elizabeth Hess of Re-Making Love: The Feminization of Sex.

The author and the happy couple. Under the sukkah-huppah, 2010.

Marrying My Brother

by Anna Schnur-Fishman

A few weeks ago I went to Wesleyan University's graduation and reunion weekend. A man visiting for his 60th reunion (class of 1951) said to me, "You know, I don't really remember my own graduation."

"Good grief, of course not," I thought, doing the math in my head.

Then he continued, "I remember every detail of my older brother's years here, though."

Now this I easily believed. The events of my own brother's life, five years ahead of mine, have always appeared crisply to me, and remained fresh, too. It's no trouble for me to recall the necklace he wore to his high school graduation, the words he spoke when he first met his college roommate, or the name of the girl whose hand he held in sixth grade, when I was six.

When Lincoln and his fiancée Hilary asked me to perform their wedding ceremony—that is, to "officiate" as a layperson at their Jewish wedding (they had a real rabbi sign the *ketubah* and marriage license)—my mother asked me if I was surprised at this honor. "No," I said without thinking.

Simcha multiplied by *nachas* compounded with adulation times the Nirvana Wedding Constant.

Well, *yes*—yes, I was tremendously surprised when they first mentioned it, and I will admit here that I was tremendously flattered, and excited, too. (I had to feign gravity and modesty the whole time.) But once I knew that they were considering officiants outside of the clergy, I wasn't surprised. Not because I think I'm so great. But because after all these years, I know *he* does.

I recently summarized this to a few friends most concisely: "We have a very hard time remembering what is bad about the other person," I said.

"That is the *opposite* definition from my siblinghood," one responded. I know. Not all siblings love each other. Some siblings who love each other very much find it very, very easy to see what is bad about the other person. Lincoln and I have a lucky connection. I generally credit him, because he established a positive relationship when I was barely a person to ponder. The sizable age gap and gender difference also ensured that we never had to fight for space.

When a youngest-child friend of mine had her first niece, she told her mom, "I love this baby so much. I couldn't possibly love my own first in this way." Her mom explained, "Your heart grows." Hopefully the intensity of the *simcha* of dancing at my brother's wedding (which is something like *simcha* multiplied by *nachas* compounded with adulation times the Nirvana Wedding Constant) won't prevent me from fitting my own wedding memories into my mind when the time comes. But honestly it's hard to imagine. ■

Anna Schnur-Fishman is an administrator at the Norman Mailer Center and Writers Colony. She recently co-authored the children's book Tashlich at Turtle Rock.

My Brother's Demons

by Yona Zeldis McDonough

The author with her mother and brother. Israel, 1957.

I lost my brother decades ago. I don't mean that in any conventional sense; he's alive, if not well, inhabiting the same 350-square-foot studio apartment he has called home for the past 30 years. But he's been lost to me for a long time, as lost as if he disappeared into a deep forest, one where the branches overhead meet and link to blot out the sky, and the roots below erupt from the ground in tumorous, dark swells.

He has spent the last 40 years in the grip of crippling mental illness that came upon him when he was about 20. He was a bright kid who underperformed in school, couldn't maintain friendships, and who was always, in my inchoate but prescient view, a little out of sync. He was different from the other long-haired, peace-sign-waving, rock-grooving older brothers of my friends. When we fought, there was something more rancorous than the anger that fuels most sibling battles. I was afraid of him, and not just physically. I secretly feared that whatever was wrong with him would rub off on me.

I feared whatever was wrong with him would rub off on me.

After high school he briefly attended Manhattan's School of Visual Arts, but soon dropped out, spending his days on the sofa instead. The real break in the fragile arc of his life came when our parents decided to divorce. Our father left in the spring of 1974, and by that August he had remarried. My brother was 21; I was 16.

My brother moved out and took a job as a night watchman. He lived alone by day; he worked alone by night. The isolation nudged him over the edge, right into eight months in the psychiatric ward at Hillside hospital in Queens. He emerged not a different person but a more sharply delineated version of himself. And that is where his life seems to have frozen, in some terrible spot where he is condemned to move ever in place, never forward.

For more than three decades he has not worked, had a significant romantic relationship, or functioned as an adult in the world. The list of experiences he has not savored—a college graduation, a wedding, a promotion, a vacation, the birth of a child—is long and sorrowful. He did not even have a bar mitzvah, because our father, despite his own fierce attachment to his Jewish identity, deemed it inessential to make him one.

Supported by disability benefits, my brother leads a life defined by his phobias. He washes his hands obsessively, and is plagued by "contamination" attacks, during which he believes that either he or an object he cares about has been tainted by some toxic substance. He is unable to tolerate anything sharp or heavy; even a hardcover book can trigger an attack. Fire terrifies him, so cooking is out of the question. He won't insert a plug into a socket, and he has a deathly fear of heights and of crowds. He has gotten treatment sporadically and without success; he has tried prescription drugs, but can't stand the side effects.

He will not see me, and while I'm relieved to be spared the evidence of his pain, I feel rejected too, as if somehow I have been deemed insufficient or wanting. We do speak on the phone, long rambling conversations in which very little of substance is ever revealed or discussed. His defenses are strong; he doesn't want to talk about our shared past: Israel, the country in which we were born but only he remembers, or what it is like to be the children of our particular parents.

So here we are, a pair of fifty-something siblings, unable to really know or reach each other. I'm aware that this is true for many siblings. But when mental illness figures into the picture, the reconciliations for which one always continues to long are even more elusive. So I shoulder the disappointment, deprived of a potential ally, friend and confidant.

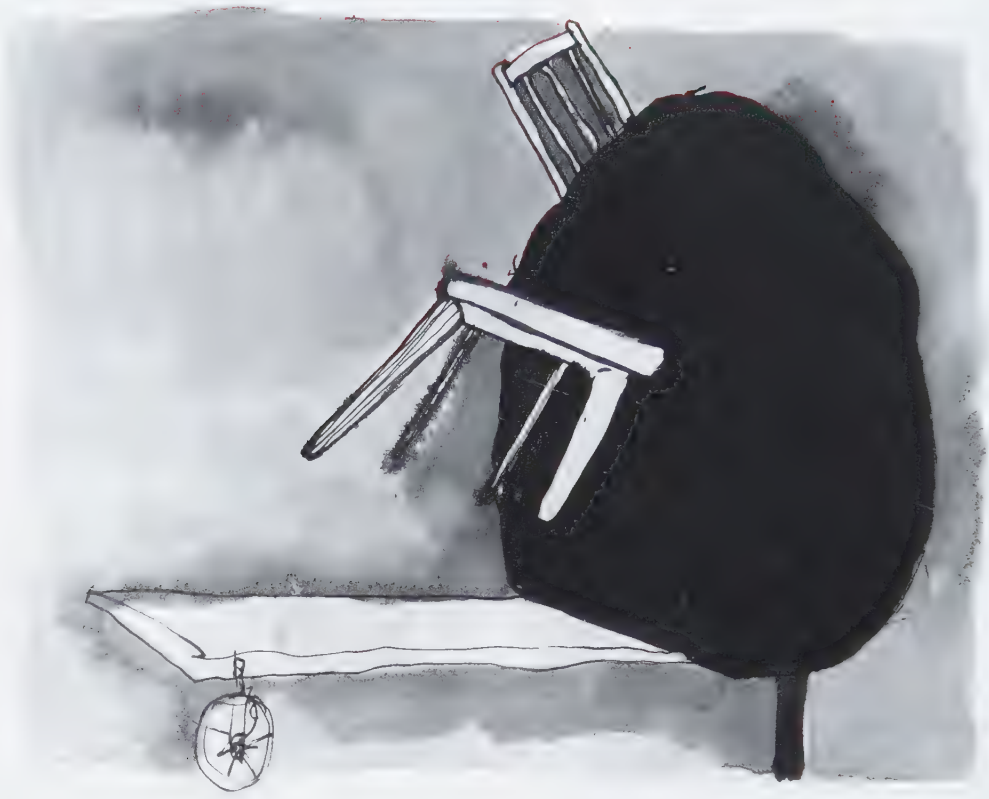
His primary relationship is with our mother. He allows her to visit, and she is deeply enmeshed in his life, making his few appointments, shopping for his clothes and household supplies. I do not want this role; the thought is unendurable. But one day I will inherit it anyway, and I will become my brother's keeper, forced to have a more intimate awareness of what it feels like to live in his skin. Our father is dead and we have no ties with extended family. Sometimes this responsibility feels like a burden, at other times, like a strange and enigmatic gift.

What will our future as sister and brother be like? The screen grows murky when I try to imagine it, and for this I'm grateful; I'll deal with the reality when I must.

For now I lead my life, while my shadow brother remains deep in the forest, a lonely wanderer among the dense and suffocating trees. ■

Yona Zeldis McDonough is Lilith's fiction editor. Her fourth novel, A Wedding in Great Neck, *is forthcoming, and her latest children's book,* The Cats in the Doll Shop, *will be out in November. www.yonazeldismcdonough.com.*

The A-Train to Scotland



Fiction by Ellen Umansky

LIZZIE NOTICED HER SHOES FIRST. Dr. Karen Brown, fiftyish, wiry gray hair cut into a pageboy, no-nonsense dark shirt and trousers, greeted her at the door of her tiny office, offering a hand and a seat. Her open-toed heels were surprisingly stylish, a bright canary yellow peeking out beneath those sensible trousers. Lizzie immediately fell in love with those shoes. She decided this was a good sign.

"I'm going to ask you some questions about your family history," Dr. Brown said in a kind but not overly familiar tone. "Let's start with your parents."

"My mother died of breast cancer, young."

"How young?"

"Forty-one. Well, almost forty-two. She died three weeks before her birthday," she added, a distinction that was becoming increasingly important to her. Though she had always been horrible at math and vastly preferred that someone else figure out the restaurant check, it took Lizzie a nanosecond to tell how many years she was away from turning forty-one.

"That is young," Dr. Brown murmured. She was sketching a family tree on a pad of paper over a cluttered desk—a collection of framed photos sat next to a high, precarious pile of folders (patients' files? containing what sort of news? Lizzie wondered). She gazed out the window onto the fat silver tubes of the ventilation system, spouting smoke, looking menacing, practically medieval. Dr. Brown's office was located in the Atran building of Mt. Sinai, which Lizzie well knew how to pronounce, but privately, she called the A-train, greatly preferring this jaunty, jazzy variation.

It had been Lizzie's idea to test for the BRCA mutation. She had read an Op-Ed in *The New York Times* on the subject. Lizzie had heard of the genetic test before—the knowledge floated in the recesses of her brain along with so many scraps, like how to change a flat tire or how the word "corn" technically referred to a country's biggest import—but she had never considered taking it. Reading the piece in the *Times*, written by a woman who had also watched her mother die of breast cancer, a woman, bone-chillingly to Lizzie, very much like herself—Ashkenazic Jew, mid-thirties, single, professionally successful, wanting a family—well, that factoid shot to the front of her brain and refused to budge. She read the

ART: NIVI ALROY

article again and again—phrases like "genetic legacy" and "predisposition to cancer" and "preventative mastectomy" lodged tightly beneath her rib cage. She reminded herself that she was a lawyer; her livelihood depended on facts. She had always placed her faith in them, professionally and personally. If a mutation was found in the 39th amino acid position of a protein of hers—if this indeed was her genetic inheritance—well, then. Unlike her mother (dead at forty-one) or her great-aunt (fifty-three), she could be the first woman in her family who could actually do something about it.

Lizzie's gynecologist had given her two names of genetics counselors—Karen Brown at Mt. Sinai and someone at Sloan-Kettering. But Sloan was where her mother had been treated, and for the more than fifteen years that Lizzie had been living in Manhattan, she had done her best to avoid York Avenue and 68th Street, the site of the cancer center, so forget about walking through its doors. Plus: how could bad news be delivered by someone whose name was as unmemorable and innocuous-sounding as Dr. Karen Brown?

So she had called Dr. Brown's office. Close to two years ago.

The cancellation of her first appointment was legitimate, Lizzie liked to think. It came during a mad crush at work—a dizzying close where she and a handful of other associates lived in the conference room around the clock. By the time she came around to rescheduling, it was autumn, what she later dubbed the fall of her fall from Ben, a time during which they were still engaged, but all she could think about was: *Oh God, I'm making a mistake. This is no time for more bad news.* Then suddenly she was single and then she turned thirty-five and then it was her mother's birthday and then the anniversary of her death, and all of those times felt so horribly wrong too.

Now here she finally was, after the fourth rescheduling. Dr. Brown was explaining about percentages and probabilities. Lizzie's chest hurt. She glanced at the photos on Dr. Brown's desk. Two little girls, one light-haired, one dark, yet unmistakably similar, clearly sisters, mugging for the camera, dressed in fuzzy monkey costumes. They must be her grandkids, Lizzie thought. Dr. Brown must have had kids in her twenties, the age you're *supposed* to have them.

She found herself asking, "What about children?"

"What about them?" Karen Brown asked, although now she was the one nodding.

"I want children," Lizzie said. "I want to *have* children," she clarified absurdly.

"Then you will," Karen Brown said, in such a crisp authoritative voice that Lizzie felt, if only for a moment, reassured. "We're getting ahead of ourselves. You'll have your bloods drawn; you'll come back for the results; we'll talk more then."

But when Lizzie did indeed return, there was no need for conversation. Karen Brown looked at her file, and cocked her head to the side. Thankfully, she did not sigh. "I'm sorry," she said, looking at Lizzie with startlingly limpid brown eyes.

On Tuesday she flew for Chicago for the day for a meeting. Wednesday found her in Boston. On Friday she left again, this time for Maddy's wedding in Scotland. All this travel was more than fine with Lizzie. She wanted to keep moving.

After a four-hour delay at Heathrow, she finally got off the plane in Aberdeen, as north as north could get ("the Scottish 'sticks," her ex-stepmother had cheerfully had called it). In the cab, she passed stolid oil rigs presiding over a glum, graying sea, and undistinguished apartment complexes and squat shopping centers, nothing like the Scotland of her imagination.

She was hungry—well, she was tired, which always made her hungry—and she was tempted to tap the squat-necked driver on the shoulder, ask him to turn around and pull into the Pizza Hut they'd just flown past, and devour several pies on the spot.

Out the window, the Aberdeen streets turned curvier and narrower, more picturesque. Soon the taxi pulled into a cobblestone driveway, leading to an old stone house that might have looked imposing, save for the front double doors painted a bright shade of blue. She paid the driver, collected her things. She headed up the walkway, curtained by blooming roses. The air smelled fragrant and clean. It was past nine p.m., but it remained light outside, the sky a lovely silvery glow.

She checked into the inn, and the fair-headed porter who looked twelve led her up the polished, uneven stone steps, telling her about the daily tea and the small bar just downstairs. Her room was small, but nicely appointed, with high ceilings and a beautifully carved bed facing a small fireplace. Charming but tasteful, Maddy's taste through and through.

Lizzie kicked off her shoes, a pair of Italian round-toed heels she'd bought on eBay in a fit of panic post-Karen Brown. She lay stomach-down on the bed. She couldn't believe she was here. She couldn't believe much of anything these days.

For nine days she had been nursing the fantasy: Maybe it was a ludicrous mistake at the lab somehow? For nine days, she had told no one of the results: not her father; not Claudia, to whom she used to declare as a teenager, "I'll just cut them off by the time I'm thirty; I'm not going through what my mother went through"; not her sister, who had a fifty percent chance of carrying the faulty gene too. How was she supposed to discuss the matter when the thought of that mutant gene made her feel as if she were being buried alive?

Though her entire body buzzed with exhaustion, she forced herself off the bed, splashed water on her face, crammed her tired feet back in her heels. Time to keep moving.

The small bar off the lobby looked more like a study than a watering hole. It sported a gold patterned carpet that was too soiled to be cheerful and a handful of leather seats beneath a neon sign heralding Woodpecker cider. Lizzie ordered a beer and, from the few food options, an egg salad sandwich. She took up residence at a small table that enabled her to gaze at that enormous, implacable sky, which still hadn't turned to night. The place was empty save two older women, one pear-shaped and short, the other tall and hardened, drinking pints of lager.

"You've always been much too hard on Tom," she heard the taller one say.

"Easy for you to say."

A young guy ambled in then, thin and wiry, gingery hair clipped short, wearing dark pants and a wrinkled white shirt. For a moment, Lizzie assumed he was a waiter, but he went up to the bar and ordered a drink in a brogue she barely understood.

Lizzie was about halfway done with her beer and her sandwich that tasted much better than it looked when she heard the shorter woman say, "He's been like this for years, Nicola—*years*!"

"Why can't you be on my side?"

"I *am* on your side."

"No, you're not; you've never been. It was like this with Michael. Your own sister. It's like Skye all over again."

"Jesus, I was eight years old!" She glared at her sister, her face heavy with recrimination, a lifetime of it, it seemed to Lizzie. *They were sisters?* Lizzie thought as she watched the women hurry out of the bar.

"Watch out for women with too much time on their hands," Lizzie now heard a voice say. It was the ginger-headed guy, the only person left in the bar, looking right at her.

"Really?" Lizzie said into her empty pint glass. She felt like it was men who were always stirring up trouble.

He walked over to her tiny table as if she had offered up the most gracious of invitations. "May I?"

She nodded. He seemed far too young to be so confident.

"You're not from around here, yeah?"

"A real detective." But she was looking at him when she said it, looking at his hands in particular. She had always been a sucker for nice hands. His were strong, expressive, with tapering fingers and clean squared-off nails cut so short she could barely make them out at all. She was looking at his hands too, to avoid looking at his attractive face. He was so young! A good ten years younger than she.

"Neither am I."

"Really? Now that I wouldn't have guessed." And this she meant. He had a thick brogue that to her ear sounded undeniably Scottish, undeniably of this place.

"You think all Scots are alike, yeah? I grew up outside of Glasgow. Nowhere near here. It's as if I assumed that you knew New Mexico just as well as New York, where I'm guessing you're from."

"I am. And I've never been to New Mexico."

"You should go, if only for the sky. I was there last winter, and I fell in love with the sky."

For some reason, this made her blush, this simple declaration of love by a Scotsman for a part of her native land she'd never seen. But instead of asking *why the sky*, which was what she really wanted to know, she asked, "What were you doing in America?"

"I was in New York, yeah, apprenticing, supposedly, to this cabinet-maker who makes these intricate pieces…" He trailed off, looking at her. "What brings you to Aberdeen?"

"A wedding, a friend's wedding." At this point, who was Maddy if not a friend?

He simply nodded, murmured something about being here for a celebration too. Could he be here for Maddy's wedding? Could her luck be that good? But when she asked what kind of celebration, he seemed not to hear—or at least pretended he hadn't—and she didn't press the matter. He wasn't asking her questions, for which she was glad. Soon they ordered whiskey. He told her how much he liked New York and Queens in particular, not Woodside, where he lived ("a shit, kind of boring neighborhood"), but places like Long Island City. The guy he apprenticed with was a real asshole, who constantly sent him out to pick up his dry cleaning. But he biked all over and he got to know New York that way, the exhaust mingling with the smell of the water, even fish, as he went over the Brooklyn Bridge…

Maybe it was this reference to biking, maybe it was this small flash of Ben who loved to do the same that fueled Lizzie on, or maybe it was the fact that she was older, more seasoned—there were things she simply wanted to know. She reached out, brushing his knuckles. "Wait," she said, as if he were just out the door. "What's your name?"

"Rory." This made him color, ducking his head. "I'm Rory. And you?"

"Lizzie." She held out her hand like the direct American that she was.

"And where do you live, Lizzie?" He dropped her hand and downed the last of his whiskey. Now he was looking out the window.

"Manhattan, the Upper Upper West Side."

"I didn't spend much time there," Rory was now saying, "Went to Central Park, biked through it, went up to the Cloisters, that type of thing. But Long Island City—for some reason, I just fell in love with Long Island City. It reminded me of Glasgow, all those factories and the industrial look of it, the empty streets. There's a beauty to it, a ferocious unkind beauty—" He looked up at her now, his pale eyebrows arching high, his wide fresh face so animated. "Have you been to the Noguchi museum, the sculpture museum? That has to got to be my favorite place."

Lizzie nodded. "Yeah, I've been there, once." She tried to say it lightly. She and Ben were supposed to get married nearby, in a loft, an airy space run by a charmingly odd woman. The first time they saw the space, they went to the Noguchi museum afterwards. There they had an epic fight. "Why would we get married somewhere so out of the way?" Ben had asked, adding (in a strategic error, Lizzie had thought, if only from a pugilistic point of view) that his mother was going to freak out that her friends would have to find their way to Queens. Lizzie was embarrassed to recall how she'd lost it, saying shrilly, who cares what their parents thought; they were getting married for themselves, who wanted a lot of their parents' friends there whom they barely knew? Blah blah blah. Finally, Ben had sighed and said, "If this is where you want to do it, let's do it here. I just want to marry you." It was a sweet, simple statement, the type of thing she had always longed to hear. And yet, it made her jaw tighten as if she were in imminent danger. They had been together almost two years at that point; Lizzie loved him, she knew that. They were nearly thirty-three, old by many people's standards. (Her grandmother loved to remind Lizzie, "When your mother was your age, she already had two children." Lizzie considered it a triumph that she didn't respond: "Yes, but she was also on the cusp of divorcing.")

Still: Lizzie couldn't breathe. Not when they talked to wedding photographers, not when she tried on dresses, not when they tried to decide if they should hire a DJ or a band. As the wedding date drew closer, Lizzie felt worse. She began to resent Ben's loud, boisterous way of telling stories, the way he constantly had to be the center of attention (God, like her father!) She began to hate the way he over seasoned and put garlic in nearly everything. She went running late at night, offered to be put on a closing at work. Even his hand on the small of her back made her want to scream. (Was this how her mother had felt?) That afternoon, at the Noguchi museum, walking among those strange, monumental forms of polished stone, Lizzie could remember thinking, distinctly and with clarity, *I don't want to be in this relationship anymore. I don't want to be on this planet anymore.* Two months later, after the engagement party on the sixteenth floor of his parents' Lake Shore apartment, but before the invitations had gone out, she had ended it altogether.

She read the article again and again—phrases like "genetic legacy" and "predisposition to cancer" and "preventative mastectomy" lodged tightly beneath her rib cage.

Now Lizzie was looking at the freckles scattered across Rory's eager face, the blond wisps of eyebrows, the few light hairs above his left cheekbone he'd missed shaving. Ostensibly this was the reason she had called off the engagement, wasn't it? For the freedom to do what she wanted? But it was exhausting, the prospect of starting over, the thought of learning someone else's history. This had been the lesson of the past year, the dates that went nowhere and hook-ups not regretful, exactly, but unsatisfying. The few that charmed her weren't charmed *by* her. No one was as funny as Ben.

Just then a passel of well-dressed people came into the bar, laughing, chatting, ordering drinks, bringing with them a loud welcoming heat. It took Lizzie a moment to realize that Maddy, in a silky green top, pulsed at the center.

"Excuse me," she said to Rory, rising, "I have to—" but as she was saying this, as Maddy was enfolding her in a tight hug, she saw that Rory too was being exclaimed over and hugged, Rory was being clapped on the back by Graham, Maddy's fiancé, of all people.

"You made it!" Maddy exclaimed. "I can't believe you actually came!"

"I wouldn't have missed it," she said, as she watched Graham smile and laugh at something Rory said.

Maddy took note too. "Oh, so you've met Graham's nephew Rory?"

"That I did," Lizzie said, still processing. She would see him tomorrow then; this was not the end.

"He's a sweetheart," Maddy said, and Lizzie was moved to hug her again. It had been more than a year since she had seen her ex-stepmother, and it heartened her, suddenly, to see such a familiar presence in such unfamiliar surroundings, so clearly besotted. She told Maddy about her flight delays, she apologized for missing the rehearsal dinner.

"I'm just so glad you made it. You look gorgeous! I like your hair—it's shorter, isn't it? And your shoes!"

"Thanks," she said, grinning. "eBay." She *knew* Maddy would appreciate them. She still thought of her when she went shopping, tried to imagine, when she was hemming and hawing over a purchase, whether Maddy would approve.

Maddy asked her how long she was staying. "Only until Sunday? But you've come all this way!"

"I've got to get back to work." Lizzie said, not thinking of work at all, but running in Riverside Park. It had been a mild June so far, but Lizzie found herself longing for the feel of a good humid New York summer evening, the pale glow of the river, the lush canopy of the trees above, as her feet hit stone after uneven stone and she concentrated so hard that breathing was all that mattered.

"Ah yes, work," Maddy gave her a gentle smile, touched the beads of the choker nestled at her throat. "You've been working hard, haven't you?"

Lizzie only nodded, gazing at Maddy's necklace. It was gorgeous, Lizzie thought, nearly painstakingly so, the ivory beads delicately etched and punctuated by tiny silver nubs. It seemed, suddenly to Lizzie, the way it grazed Maddy's neck, nicely offsetting her silky green top, like the epitome of style.

"Too hard."

Lizzie nodded again, flushing under the attention of Maddy's steady eye. Her ex-stepmother didn't miss a thing. If Lizzie spoke, she might cry. The necklace was nothing. She found herself on the verge of telling Maddy the news that she had been trying so hard to tamp down for more than a week now. I don't know what to do., she wanted to whisper: *Please. Tell me what I should do.*

But instead, Lizzie found herself saying: "You look so beautiful, so happy." And she didn't try to cover the wistfulness that crept into her voice.

Maddy laughed, hugged her again. "Well, I am happy, I am."

Lizzie kissed her cheek, feeling so tired and raw, feeling as if the roles were reversed: She was the older, divorced one, and her ex-stepmother a woman in her prime, with all the time in the world. ■

Ellen Umansky's fiction has been published in Playboy, Jane, Tablet, and the anthologies Sleep Away *and* The Lost Tribe: Jewish Fiction from the Edge.

Winner of Lilith's 2011 Charlotte A. Newberger Poetry Prize

SOMETIMES THE DEAD

by BABO KAMEL

My mother is always alive when I dream of her.
In her downtown clothes the silk scarf floats
on her shoulder, she waves her white gloves.

•

On the hill above the cemetery, the empty wooden swing
sweeps back and forth as if a young girl still rides
its perfect arc above the graves.

•

In the subterranean station it is night in either direction.
Voices of the dead call to each other across the tracks,
as if each were a name they could return to.

•

Sometimes the dead cover the mirrors

with their own faces
so when I look at myself

it's my mother's features I see—
the way I remember her

in the clamp of letting go.

•

The dead mourn
for themselves from the dark terminals

of their eyes, all night
toss and sweat

under the rose-patterned sheets
a weed in my own bed

as if I didn't belong there,
as if the dead were entitled

to as much room as they need.

Babo Kamel coordinates a program for high-risk students and teaches at North Shore Community College in Lynn, MA. A graduate of Warren Wilson's MFA program, she has been published in various literary reviews including The Greensboro Review, Contemporary Verse 2, The Grolier Poetry Prize Annual and Alligator Juniper.

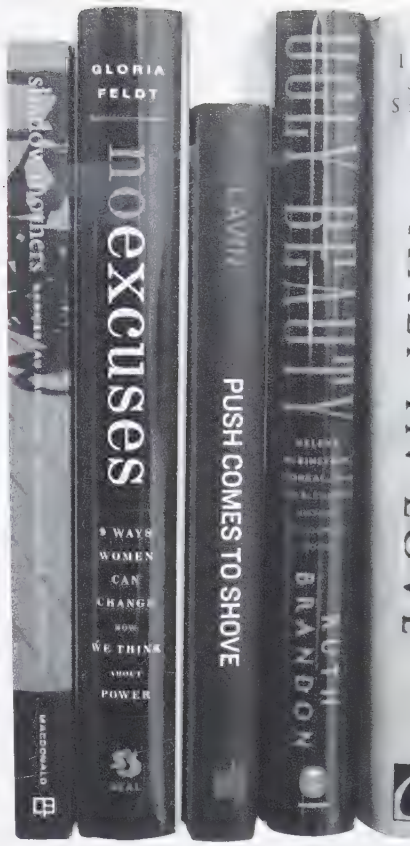
ABOUT THE JUDGE

Marcia Falk is a poet, translator, and painter (www.marciafalk.com). She lectures widely on Jewish women's poetry and is now writing The Days Between, *a book of liturgy to accompany the High Holiday season.*

MARCIA FALK COMMENTS:

In Babo Kamel's darkly elegiac poem, the startling image of the dead covering the mirrors with their faces brings to mind two very different associations. One thinks immediately, of course, of the traditional Jewish practice of covering mirrors in the house of mourning. Then, when the speaker goes on to say that she sees her mother's features in the mirror, the image expands in resonance, recalling the twentieth-century Hebrew poem by Leah Goldberg "From My Mother's House." The speaker of Goldberg's poem looks into a mirror handed down by her grandmother and sees, behind her own face, a vision of her grandmother — young, radiant, and beautiful. But whereas in "From My Mother's House" the mirror "passes on the family lore," in "Sometimes the Dead" it points toward a terrible isolation: the speaker disappears from sight, then becomes a weed in her own bed, crowded out by the ghosts inhabiting her room. Where Goldberg's poem is an elegant lyric reverie on a long-deceased foremother, Kamel's is a powerful description of fresh grief.

REVIEWS



Superwoman & Her Cape

Those fraught relationships between mothers and nannies

I have a friend who is a Superwoman. She has four kids under the age of six, multiple degrees, has launched a successful nonprofit, and is in the process of launching another. In addition, she wears a serene smile on her face and dresses beautifully. I asked her how she does it. She sparkled. "I couldn't do any of it without my cape," she said. Her cape? "My nanny," she whispered.

Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering, (University of California Press, $22.95) , by **Cameron Lynne Macdonald**, exposes the relationships between superwomen and their capes, attempting to understand what happens on the home-front when the mommies put on their smiles and high heels and go to work. She interviews upper-middle-class women who, on the whole, *choose* to work, heightening the emotional charge around their decision. These women work for a variety of reasons: some want to provide their children with a lifestyle that necessitates two salaries; others pessimistically anticipate the potential of one day needing to depend on a single salary, and fear leaving the work force; still others (gasp) seek the fulfillment, independence, and stimulation of work outside the home. Regardless, they are all "caught in a vise between the cultural pressure of the ideology of intensive mothering and the structural rigidity of male-pattern careers," and so turn "to a private solution to a public problem. They hire a wife."

Macdonald notes that "working mothers are…faced with the hard reality that they cannot be in two places at once." She spends the majority of the book defining the patterns of behavior they use to (micro) manage the home-front, a space in which, "paradoxically, they felt out of control…*because* of the success they had worked so hard to attain [at work]." She notes two pervasive patterns: Mothering by proxy, in which mothers turn their caregivers "into extensions of themselves," and create rules "to produce a consistent childcare experience for their children, regardless of the nanny." And "shadow-mothering," where the nanny is given autonomy while the mother is not home, but must "vanish upon the real mother's return, leaving no trace of her presence in the psychic lives of the children they shared." Both methods, she concludes, ultimately result in frustrated nannies and guilt-ridden mothers. Not to mention confused, hurt children.

Macdonald's research into the behaviors of nannies and mothers exposes that, overall, each woman is thinking primarily about herself—her career, her fulfillment, her status, her feelings. She often cites examples of children embracing nannies and mothers bristling; in these cases, the nannies must assuage the hurt feelings of the mother. The feelings of the children become secondary. In this complex relationship between the superwoman and her cape, "children's affections were often the primary currency," tools in a negotiation process, and data for evaluation. Macdonald's work raises vital questions and points to important patterns in the mother-nanny relationship. Perhaps most importantly, though, it reveals that the cause of all this, the children, are truly the ones in the shadows, caught between their mother's skirt and her cape.

MAYA BERNSTEIN

She Fights Back

How to be the best troublemaker you can be

For too long women have been expected to be passive. Two recent books—***No Excuses: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think about Power*** (Seal Press, $24.95) by **Gloria Feldt** and ***Push Comes to Shove*** (MIT Press, 27.95) by **Maud Lavin**—champion and advocate driven and aggressive women. Push Comes to Shove discusses the current state of art and entertainment, while No Excuses offers a mixture of memoir, anecdote and advice on how women can step forward and take what is rightfully theirs.

Lavin, a professor of art history at the Art Institute of Chicago, acknowledges the negative side of aggression—how it can lead to violence and pain, but she concentrates on the positive aspects. "Aggression is, on one level, a drive, primal and dynamic energy. And this, stopping short of violence, I celebrate."

Lavin gives the reader images of aggressive women, both factual and fictional, without ignoring the psychological dimension of aggressive behavior. She cites examples of female athletes, including boxers. In fiction, she considers movies with sports themes, like *Blue Crush*, and novels by erotica writer Zane, who, Lavin asserts, "encourages play," which she views as another side of aggression. She includes a chapter on harmful violence, in which she discusses the *Kill Bill* movies and Marlene McCarty's *Murder Girls* art series. *Kill Bill* is escapism that doesn't hurt anyone. *Murder Girls*, however, is based on real-life female murderers. Though Lavin focuses on artistic interpretation of the artworks rather than the murderous girls themselves, this feels out of place in a book dedicated to exploring the positive side of aggression. Lavin's thesis is that positive images of aggressive women are increas-

ingly coming to us through entertainment and sports, and that society is accepting and embracing these images.

No Excuses is concerned with the real world rather than its artistic representation. Gloria Feldt, a former president and CEO of Planned Parenthood, stresses the importance of women seeking political and other leadership roles, working toward careers rather than staying at home. This enterprising lifestyle isn't for everyone, but Feldt points out that many women earn college degrees they don't use, or start climbing a career ladder only to quit early. Why, she asks, do so many women opt out? She cites sobering statistics about how few women are involved in American politics or high-ranking jobs. As of 2010, Feldt notes: "Women hold 25% of state legislative offices; just 3% of clout positions in mainstream media corporations, and 15% of corporate board positions—Feldt interviews many women, from household-name politicians like Hillary Clinton ("Women who value their autonomy have to step up and talk action"), to She Writes cofounders Kamy Wicoff and Deborah Siegel, to memoirist and journalist Sarah Saffian. Feldt also includes her own dramatic life story: She went from being a nice Jewish girl in Bible Belt Texas to a teenage mother who had to educate herself and build up a career. By twenty she had three children and had married her high school sweetheart, but she wanted more to life than being a homemaker and was able to go to college once the pill freed her from reproductive fears.

No Excuses packs quite a punch. Mini-biographies of influential women and timelines of feminist activism indicate that, as Feldt says, women have plenty of ambition, but sometimes lack the resolve to make things happen: "[T]he real question is whether women have sufficient *intention* to start from the assumption that they can (and by all rights should) propel themselves to parity in elective office and have the will to stay with it until they do." She also stresses the idea of "power-to" instead of "power-over," reminding us that power should be used to help and not to oppress.

DANICA DAVIDSON

Telling in Silence

A major Israeli powerhouse tells her story

In the gripping title story of the collection ***Hold On to the Sun*** by **Michal Govrin** (The Feminist Press, $16.95), a scholar of liturgy is haunted by the notion that the Jerusalem streets he traverses are only the fleeting product of his passage, non-existent before he walks through them and afterwards erased. In the course of a research project, he finds himself in a murky Judaica shop in an ultra-Orthodox enclave. Does the shop truly exist? What matters more is his discovery of an old artifact relating to an obscure, possibly imaginary and probably heretical and dangerous interpretation of the evening prayer, Maariv. Govrin's story, which reads like the literary progeny of Edgar Allan Poe and the 19th-century halachist Shlomo Ganzfried, links prayer, art, and paganism with the twin human strivings for perpetuity and destruction. It leaves us, and the scholar, at once uplifted and disturbed, and unable to tie it all neatly together.

Michal Govrin reads like the literary progeny of Edgar Allan Poe and a 19th century halakhist.

Michal Govrin was born in Israel just after the State's establishment to a mother who survived Auschwitz but lost her first family there, a husband and a little boy of eight, Marek. Far from being overwhelmed with the facts of her mother's tragedy, Govrin pieced it together only through fragmented divulgences. "I learned from her the lesson of telling in silence," Govrin states in an essay recounting the arduous process of inhabiting her legacy as a second-generation survivor, a journey she calls "obstinate, lonely, and full of contradictions." Published recently as a translated compilation, her collected short works, including stories, essays and poetry spanning nearly four decades, reveal a fascinating author to whom the unspeakable presents the one worthwhile subject.

The author, who calls Auschwitz "an extreme manifestation of the human soul," cautions that Holocaust commemoration should not "reiterate a sadistic urge and draw on the same fascination with violence," does not dedicate herself to literal depictions of a genocidal project. Through Govrin's essays we learn of the *zenerschaft*, the extraordinary 10-woman inmate alliance instrumental to the survival of Govrin's mother, or of the chance encounter on an Israeli bus with a survivor who owes his life to self-compromise. "The End of the Phythia" intones a parable on conscience and chaos, and in a similar vein "The Dance of the Thinker" laments the deathly discipline of life's interpreters. "Jet Lag" follows a travelling businessman who seems also to be voyaging through critical phases of estrangement from his wife, while "Between Two and Four" observes what happens one day during the Israeli siesta, when an awkward child slips away from her napping parents and into a perilous realm of misinterpretation.

Ranging across a dramatically varied landscape, from lucid memoir to grand myth and psychologically astute fiction, *Hold On to the Sun* is a beautiful, demanding and unforgettable work that takes on nothing more than the stuff we are made of and what we make of ourselves, both in our most extreme and most ordinary manifestations.

NAAMA GOLDSTEIN

The Business of Beauty

Helena Rubenstein's Jewish roots

In ***Ugly Beauty: Helena Rubinstein, L'Oreal and the Blemished History of Looking Good*** (Harper, $26.99), **Ruth Brandon** masterfully blends her expertise as a cultural historian and biographer with her talent for writing detective stories and literary novels to produce a page-turning, insightful sprawl of a book. The mys-

tery is this: how is Jewish entrepreneur Helena Rubinstein (1870–1965) connected to L'Oreal's founder, the fascist Eugene Schueller (1881–1957), and what does the beauty business have to do with Nazi collaboration in Vichy and political scandals of modern-day France?

Helena Rubinstein sold women self-confidence, pushing the boundaries for how "nice" women looked.

Brandon conducts a thorough investigation of both protagonists' lives. She juxtaposes Helena Rubinstein's story as the eldest of eight girls from a poor, Polish Jewish family with that of Schueller, an only child born into a poor French conservative family who, through a bit of luck and a lot of hard work, managed to obtain an education as a chemist, inventing the first harmless hair dye and founding L'Oreal in 1909. Helena (née Chaja) also defied fate; instead of marrying the widower her father had picked out, she ran off to family in Australia, where she quickly capitalized on the weather-worn Australian women's reactions to her own smooth skin by selling them pots of her "special" cream.

Rubinstein and Schueller's lives and careers spanned both world wars, though they never met, and when L'Oreal took over Rubinstein's company in 1988, three past scandals emerged. All were related to the not-so-distant Nazi-collaborator past of Schueller and some of his employees, one of whom was a vicious anti-Semite who befriended Helena Rubinstein in her old age and spearheaded L'Oreal's takeover of her company. *Ugly Beauty* is an apt title, implying a multitude of paradoxes, including the attractive and not-so-attractive qualities of many of the people it depicts. But most paradoxical is the beauty business itself. At the turn of the 20th century, Rubinstein and Schueller were selling women tools that would improve their self-confidence, something that the prevailing Victorian culture wanted to deny women. Today, the beauty business might well be perceived not as emancipating women from the strictures of what "nice" women are supposed to do, but as enslaving women to their appearance for the sake of conforming, again, to what others expect of them. Brandon does a fine job of trying to get to the bottom of the beauty business, no simple task given that the industry's purpose is to cover up blemishes, hide flaws, and color over the truth to look good.

ANGELA HIMSEL

The Problem of Being Alive

Ann Sexton's daughter wrestles with a troubled legacy

In her memoir ***Half In Love*** (Counter Point, 25.00), **Linda Gray Sexton**, daughter of poet Anne Sexton, grapples with two of her mother's legacies: a literary life and a death wish. In this insightful and moving memoir, Sexton explores and navigates the evolution of these legacies that translate into two primal forces: creativity and destruction.

Linda Sexton tells of how she wrote poetry when she was young, but as an adult turned to prose. In her first memoir, *Searching for Mercy Street*, she explored her complex relationship with her mother. Sexton describes *Half In Love* as a sequel, an exploration of her mother's death.

"As a child I had watched the way she [Anne Sexton] made her illness into a career.... Once depression became subject matter, she began to write about it more openly in her poetry.... Sadly, I also realized that I wanted to be able to rise up someday and spin the straw of my own misery into gold, just the way mother did. ... I also realized that I wanted none of it."

In the aftermath of Anne Sexton's suicide, nurturing her mother's literary legacy is what sustained her 21-year-old daughter. When Linda, who became her mother's literary executor, graduated from Harvard with degrees in English and American Language and Literature cum laude, the publisher Houghton and Mifflin asked her to edit a volume of her mother's correspondence.

Linda Sexton took several detours from her mother's path. She married her college boyfriend and converted to Judaism for him, though her relationship to Judaism is not explored in her memoir. Sexton poignantly describes her own attempt to be more than a good enough mother to her two sons. Although she inherited a legacy of poor mothering, and was often filled with anxiety and doubt, she gave her children everything she had. Sadly, even this mother-love wasn't enough to subsume the destructive force.

"Depression is a country with no borders. In my mid-thirties, just after my children were born, I found myself to be a citizen there." While over the decade that followed she was able to leave that country for some of her happiest years of family life, when she turned 45, the age her mother was when she had taken her life, Linda returned to the country of depression, a prisoner.

Sexton never asks for sympathy from her readers but serves as a tour guide of a mysterious and sometimes uninhabitable country. This narrative allows us to look, again, at the tangled webs of our own legacies, to ask which ones let light in and which bring darkness.

DINA ELENBOGEN

"A Regular Sarah Bernhardt"

Even Andy Warhol was her fan

Sarah: The Life of Sarah Bernhardt by **Robert Gottlieb** (Yale University Press, $25.00) is a breezy, somewhat irreverent look at the life of the famous French stage and early film actress. Bernhardt, who debuted in the theaters Paris in the 1870s, invented herself as both an actress and as one of the first world-renowned media celebrities. Along the way she demonstrated not only blazing dramatic talent but also a flair for making money—and as quickly losing it—and a predilection for spectacle in both her professional and personal life.

All the elements of the Bernhardt biography are here: The famous roles, the elaborate costumes and jewels, the international tours, the parade of lovers, the fierce French patriotism, the amputated leg, the coffin in which she reputedly slept. The book is enhanced with numerous photographs that illustrate the power of Bernhardt's dramatic appeal and charismatic personality. Gottlieb adds great interest to his account of the elusive actress by discussing the problematic biographical sources available, many written either by sworn enemies or by defensive family members. Her own memoirs are unreliable, to say the least, and Gottlieb clearly indicates when he is speculating or relying on others' speculations.

Although Sarah Bernhardt was baptized at age 12, and referred to herself as a Roman Catholic, Gottlieb notes that "there was never a question of her forgetting that she was also a Jew, even if the world would have let her forget it." In fact, she was dogged throughout her career by anti-Semitic attacks. In 1905, while performing in Montreal, she was pelted with rotten eggs on the stage and followed to the train station by cries of "Kill the Jewess." Still, Bernhardt took pride in her Jewish roots, which she saw more as a matter of race than religion. She was a staunch defender of Alfred Dreyfus even at the cost of a very serious breach with her beloved son Maurice.

By the time Sarah Bernhardt died in 1923, she had achieved iconic status. No other actress of her time had performed so many roles in front of so many audiences in so many places. Her repertoire ranged from classical heroines such as Phedre and Cleopatra to a gender-bending personification of *L'Aiglon*, Napoleon's young and dying son, which she continued to perform well into old age. Her personal bravery tending to and performing for soldiers perilously close to the front lines during both the Franco-Prussian War and World War I earned her the adoration of the masses in France: The municipal council of Paris staged a funeral attended by hundreds of thousands of people, with the cortege pausing in front of the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt.

Gottlieb closes his account by tracing the long afterlife of Bernhardt's image in theater history, fashion, and popular culture. As he concludes, anyone who has ever purchased the Madame Alexander Sarah Bernhardt doll, or anyone who has ever admired Andy Warhol's silk screen rendition of her portrait, or, more to the point, anyone who had ever been admonished for "being a regular Sarah Bernhardt" can testify to the power of her legacy.

MELISSA R. KLAPPER

Cynthia Ozick Takes on Europe

The novelist repossesses Henry James

Old loves die hard and have lasting consequences; so we learn from **Cynthia Ozick**'s ***Foreign Bodies*** (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $26.00). Speaking of old loves, much has been made of Ozick's early and ongoing literary love affair with Henry James. *Foreign Bodies*, an homage to her master, will have bookish readers puzzling out correspondences to James' *The Ambassadors* as she retells that story with an ingenious twist; her Paris in 1952 is still reeling from the aftershocks of WW II. It is a gray and foreboding city, teeming with refugees. "They were Europeans whom Europe had set upon; they wore Europe's tattoo." "Though they had washed up in Paris, the war was still with them." To this Paris, Bea Nightingale, Ozick's female version of James' ambassador, Lambert Strether, is sent by her brother Marvin to fetch home his son Julian, who seems after three years away to have been swallowed up by Europe. She finds Julian in thrall to Lili, a Holocaust survivor.

But just as you don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's Rye Bread, you don't have to be an English major to enjoy Ozick's wondrous accomplishments in her latest work. Bea Nightingale, who resembles an earlier Ozick protagonist, Ruth Puttermesser of *The Puttermesser Papers*, is a single, middle-aged, feisty, independent New Yorker. At 19, the young Bea shamefacedly told her fiancé, Leo, that her ambition was to "…make my mark in this world." As the story opens, one would think that aspiration a dream deferred, or perhaps one never to be fulfilled.

Bea, now 43, lives in a tiny apartment dominated by Leo's huge grand piano, left behind after their divorce. She became a school teacher to support Leo's dreams of composing, and spends her days teaching English to great hulks of young men who mock her efforts. Always it seems that she has settled for second best. Marvin went to Princeton; she was consigned by family economics to a city college. Leo composed; she had to make her mark on unruly school boys.

All along, buoyed by strong women, in particular, Lili, the refugee who has taken up with Julian, Bea both wreaks havoc and saves lives. She buzzes from New York City to Paris, to Los Angeles,

home to brother Marvin, his neurasthenic and patrician wife and Leo, her ex, back to Paris and then to her New York apartment suddenly made larger by the removal of that foreboding piano. At first, Bea does not know what to make of Lili. Is she an opportunist hoping to cash in on Julian's wealthy background? Or is she a survivor of unspeakable tragedy hoping to rescue Julian from his drifting, vapid life? Bea herself lies, thwarts and meddles at every turn. Is it for revenge on the men who have denigrated her, or is she opting for life for Marvin's Julian and daughter Iris and for Lili, and ultimately for herself? "How good you are!" says Lili to Bea, a telling judgment. How good Bea truly is, and how indelible her mark, are questions readers will ask in this satisfying, provocative and brilliant novel.

FAYE MOSKOWITZ

Who is a Jew?

Ten essayists weigh in

Boundaries of Jewish Identity, edited by **Susan A. Glenn** and **Naomi B. Sokoloff** (University of Washington Press, $30.00), is an outstanding collection of essays that makes clear that the question "Who is a Jew?" has many answers. The essays engage this question not only across time and space but in matters as diverse as Israeli and American literature, Polish film, genetics and Jewish converts to Christianity in Russia in the nineteenth century who were beloved to their fellow Jews.

The essays, both scholarly and highly readable, capture the "human struggle for ownership of Jewishness" that the editors outline, and show the variety of responses to that struggle, in specific contexts. Many of the essays engage issues of gender—not surprising, in a work on boundary and difference. Lila Corwin Berman uses mid-century debates about intermarriage to examine the discursive terms of those debates that set generations against one another.

Susan Kahn's "Are Genes Jewish" is a wonderful distillation of the many issues that surround surrogacy, genetic testing, and the strains within Jewish thought about defining the essence of Judaism. Erica Lehrer's complex reading of the film "Dekalog 8: Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness" examines the issue of Polish/Jewish reconciliation following the Holocaust through the characters of two women.

Susan Glenn's stellar essay on the complexity of visual stereotypes and modern Jewish identity, "Funny, You Don't Look Jewish," summarizes with remarkable economy the complex development of ideas about Jewish race and appearance and how they emerge from social scientific ideas and Jews' efforts to create a shared identity. Her work illuminates the issues explored by many scholars on notions of Jewish women's bodies and appearances. Glenn argues that "To blend in, Jewish men changed their names; Jewish women changed their noses." She explains that in the 1940s and 1950s "more than half of those seeking rhinoplasties in the United States were Jews, most of them female adolescents hoping to attain a more "normal" American appearance without abandoning their Jewish identity. Non Jewish women also had rhinoplasties to avoid being categorized as Jewish."

Not surprisingly, the two essays that focus on Israel amplify the questions of boundaries to a different decibel. Naomi Sokoloff's reading of the work of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli writers systematically explores the complex meaning of stereotype in literature and media, suggesting hopefully that they may not only close off relationships with other groups, but force the reader to consider limits on how "others" are portrayed. She finds hope in some literary stereotypes for expanding notions of who is an Israeli. Gad Barzilai's "Who is a Jew" is an impressive analysis of citizenship law in Israel, examining how dynamic the question of "who is a Jew" actually is in the state, and underlines the political nature of these questions.

Boundaries of Jewish Identity keeps the complex question of how difference is reckoned at the center of each essay. It is a quintessential work of Jewish scholarship—the questions are hard and the answers complex, open-ended, and midwives of future questions.

RIV-ELLEN PRELL

Handmaidens of Jewish Feminism

Tracking recent history

Two new books succeed in describing the complex roles of Jewish women in the time of Betty Friedan and the rise of the second wave feminist movement in America. In ***Jewish Feminists: Complex Identities and Activist Lives*** (University of Illinois Press, $20.00), **Dina Pinsky** seeks to build a complex understanding of who these foot-soldiers—or is it handmaidens?—of Jewish feminism are, and how they understand the two strands of their lives and work coming together, or, in some cases, not. Pinsky, decades younger than her subjects, conducted in-depth interviews with 25 women and five men of the second-wave feminist movement, and had them carefully consider the ways in which their feminist and Jewish identities converge, diverge, interlock and push against one another.

Jewish Feminists is an intriguingly constructed book, weaving together personal narratives and academic research. Although marred at times by a flattened understanding of time—Pinsky refers to the "upsurge of Jewish-feminism" as having occurred 20 years ago (which this reviewer would contest) and includes in her review of recent literature accounts published in the 1970s—*Jewish Feminists* contributes strikingly to our understanding of this complicated topic, thanks to Pinsky's innovative breakdown of her material.

The book's four sections explore in turn feminist activism through the lens of ritual engagement (Pinsky's wonderfully named "Torah warriors"), "the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence," marginalization of Jewish identity within feminist or other left-wing settings, and an examination of male Jewish feminism. These categories are not obvious ones, and yet in choosing this structure, Pinsky allows the multiplicity inherent in her interviewees' narratives to shine through.

While *Jewish Feminists* seeks to build a comprehensive narrative from the ground up, the editors of ***A Jewish Feminine Mystique? Jewish Women in Postwar America*** (Rutgers University Press, $25.95) attempt to break a pre-

conceived narrative down. **Hasia Diner**, **Shira Kohn** and **Rachel Kranson** marshal their impressive array of contributing authors towards one goal: to demonstrate that Jewish women in the American postwar period had a complicated relationship with the archetypal Woman of Betty Friedan's famous tome. Although the external situations of many of the women examined in *A Jewish Feminine Mystique?* match Friedan's formula—middle- to upper-middle-class white women, newly suburban surroundings, normative domesticity—these authors find notable examples where Jewish women navigated these situations in ways that complicate Friedan's "problem with no name."

Some women had no choice but to fail to fit the paradigm, such as the Egyptian Jews in Audrey Nasar's chapter. These were newly arrived immigrants in the postwar period, adjusting to life in America and to living outside the normative Ashkenazi narrative of Jewish experience here. Others, like Jenny Grossinger, managed to inhabit Friedan's stereotype even as they subverted it to their professional advantage, as Rachel Kranson meticulously documents. Other highlights of this volume include Nancy Sinkoff's illuminating examination of Lucy Dawidowicz's shifting politics and Giovovanna Del Negro's piece on the down-and-dirty jokes of Jewish comediennes of this period. Not a chapter here feels extraneous, and no serious scholar of this period can afford to pass by this satisfying read.

Taken together, these books provide a rich chorus of voices, further proving that whatever the lives of Jewish women in the American postwar period were, they weren't simple.

MELANIE WEISS

Good and Bad Mothers

Challenging new fiction from Israel

Given the thriving motherhood industry—with books and mommy blogs featuring rigid philosophies of childcare and manuals on feeding, sleeping, and calming fussy babies—I wonder what the experts and bloggers would say about **Orly Castel-Bloom**'s novel ***Dolly City*** (Dalkey Archive, $13.95) and its bad mother. Armed with dubious credentials from the University of Katmandu, Dolly, a surgeon, uses her son's body to orchestrate some of the most macabre and violent scenes in Israeli literature, deftly translated into English by Dalya Bilu. Dolly can't help but cut him open over and over again. Like most new parents, she constantly second-guesses herself, and subjects her son to relentless and unnecessary operations to reassure herself that everything is in place. In one early scene, Dolly carves a map of the biblical Land of Israel on her son's back but later updates her handiwork to reflect current borders. As her son grows, the lines shift and change; Dolly's first lesson that some things are out of her control.

A brutally honest examination of the layers of love and ruin over which we build—and rebuild—our personal and national homes.

Dolly's appetite for violence is exacerbated by the illness, decay and death that she perceives around her (and which inform the novel's political subtext). Dolly can't shake off a sense of doom, a feeling that something is fundamentally wrong. Convinced that this pervasive violence must—or eventually will—infect her son, she secludes him in her high-rise apartment. Dolly struggles with letting go—what parent doesn't?—and the novel's dystopian landscapes seem to corroborate her concerns, but a warped maternal protective instinct also motivates Dolly, which raises the question: is it any safer inside the home?

Ella Miller, the protagonist of **Zeruya Shalev**'s novel ***Thera*** (Toby Press, $24.95), is Dolly's polar opposite, the kind of mother who makes sure that her child's favorite food fills the fridge (schnitzel and chocolate milk) and rushes to pick him up from school on time. When the novel opens, Ella is recently separated from Amnon, her husband of 10 years, with whom she shares custody of their six-year old son, Gilad (Gili). Amnon wants nothing of divorce, but Ella wants nothing more than to live life on her terms. Translators H. Sacks and Mitch Ginsburg capture Ella's ambivalence with a fidelity that feels too literal at times; but it would be too easy, and misleading, to smooth out the grammar of her thoughts.

The novel takes its name from a massive volcanic eruption that buried an entire city, a site that Ella, a trained archeologist, has studied for years. The eruption may have precipitated, Ella theorizes, the ten Biblical plagues and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Throughout the novel, excavation serves as a metaphor for the psychological and emotional digging that each character engages to make sense, often futilely, of the homes that have been left behind. "Throughout, I fear that I am too late, for a site can be excavated only once, and I have acted rashly, hastily casting aside dirt of inestimable importance, without sieving, without documenting, rendering it impossible for any future excavator to verify or refute the date or their meaning, and neither can I, for the remains have been removed forever." The challenges of rebuilding her life (with the soon-to-be-divorced father of one of Gili's school friends) force Ella to confront her deeply ingrained expectations and needs, a process that requires her to accept responsibility for her part in the demise of her marriage.

Mistakes, any mother will tell you, are only natural, but *Dolly City* and *Thera* offer particularly unflinching portrayals of motherhood. Dolly and Ella are very different kinds of mothers, but what their stories have in common is a brutally honest

examination of the layers of love and ruin over which we build—and rebuild—our personal and national homes.

ADRIANA X. JACOBS

Bukharan Murder Mystery

A mother's conviction

In ***Iphigenia in Forest Hills: Anatomy of a Murder Trial*** (Yale University Press, $25), **Janet Malcolm** writes, "We go through life mishearing and mis-seeing and misunderstanding so that the stories we tell ourselves will add up. Trial lawyers push this human tendency to a higher level. They are playing for higher stakes than we are playing for when we tinker with actuality in order to transform the tale told by an idiot into an orderly, self-serving narrative." The tragic costs of wanting coherency are at the core of the gripping and unresolved courtroom drama this book documents.

Mazoltuv Borukhova is the beleaguered protagonist, a beautiful young doctor in Queens, New York, and a member of the Bukharan Jewish community known for religiosity and insularity. She is accused of hiring an assassin to kill her estranged and allegedly abusive husband, with whom she was locked in a rancorous custody battle for their four-year-old child. Borukhova and her community are drawn into a murder trial rife with accusations of domestic violence, sexual impropriety and child abuse. "She couldn't have done it, and she must have done it," Malcolm writes—and her incisive criticism of the American courtroom is all the more piercing for this abiding uncertainty. (Borukhova is eventually convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison, yet Malcolm seems unconvinced by the evidence.)

As much as this is the story of one family's violent disintegration, Malcolm argues that it is even more the story of the American justice system. She posits that the idea of a neutral courtroom is a fantasy, an impartial jury an absurdity. From day one of the trial, Malcolm contends, the stars are aligned against Mazoltuv Borukhova—the venomous judge, the stacked jury, the appointment of a malicious law guardian over her daughter.

According to Malcolm, if you are a woman in an isolated, patriarchal community, turning to the American justice system for protection does not mean that *your* truth will emerge victorious, nor that the price will be bearable. "I know of no other case where a well-cared-for child is taken from its mother because it sits on her lap during supervised visits with an absent father and refuses to 'bond' with him," Malcolm writes. Borukhova's daughter pays the price, torn from her imprisoned mother, shuttled between hostile sides in an extended family.

There's a heart-wrenching scene in *Crime and Punishment* where the tortured Roskolnikov is confronted by his nemesis, Svidrigailov, who has overheard Raskolnikov's anguished confession. Svidrigailov revels in his incontrovertible and undeserved power over Raskolnikov. It's a moment of breathtaking injustice—and the beloved but flawed hero has no way to expose the manipulation.

Similar sanctioned injustice, with its ring of nihilist Russian tragedy, courses through Malcolm's *Iphigenia*, though the title harks back to the Greek story of Clymnestra, who kills her husband after he sacrifices their daughter. But for both the reader and the protagonist here, there is no respite, since this is no fiction.

SONIA ISARD

Our Reviewers

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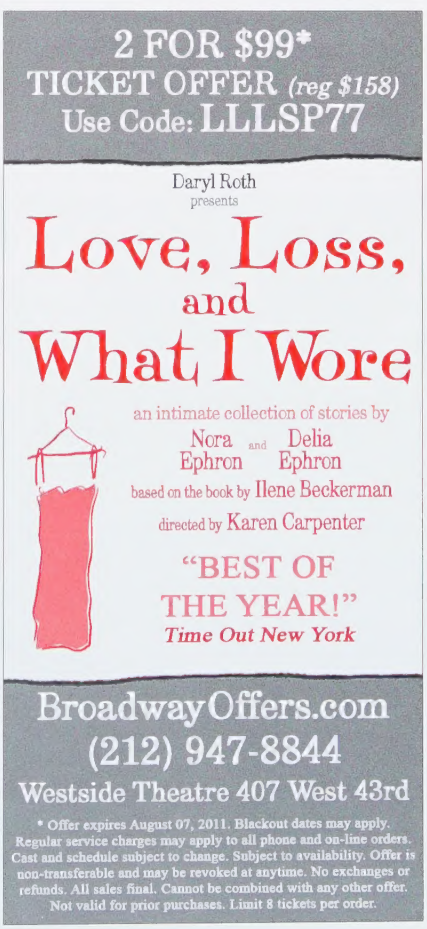

HAPPENING

IMAGES COURTESY OF KESHET

Harvey Milk, Kate Bornstein, and Lesléa Newman

are the first three subjects in the LGBT Jewish Heroes poster series from Keshet, and organization which works for full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Jews in Jewish life. In 1978, in San Francisco, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay man elected to a major public office in the U.S. He was assassinated that same year. A fierce advocate for youth and "gender outlaws," Kate Bornstein is a Jewish transgender author, playwright, performance artist and gender theorist. Lesléa Newman is a human rights activist, poet and author of the groundbreaking children's book *Heather Has Two Mommies* and the award-winning short story "A Letter to Harvey Milk" [Lilith Summer 1988]. Idit Klein says the posters "will help young LGBT Jews and their friends and family never question their rightful place in the community." Set of three for $25; more resources at *keshetonline.org*, or *LGBTJewishHeroes.org*.

Holy Ghetto

Against the background of a sex trafficking industry in Israel where approximately 3,000 women are trafficked each year, a film in progress by director/producer Ilan Azoulai traces the lives of marginalized women in Tel Aviv's red light district. The character-driven film will intimately explore personal narratives that are emblematic of a nation's battle towards recovery: three sex trafficking victims trying to regain their rights as mothers and legal citizens and to liberate themselves from a cycle of prostitution, drugs, poverty and abuse, providing a detailed picture of the landscape from which its victims must recover. You can see the trailer and lend support for completion of the film *holyghettofilm.com*.

Progressive Activism and Volunteering in Israel

This new resource hub, known by its acronym PAVI, connects English-speaking students and young professionals with activist and advocacy opportunities in Israel through volunteer and internship directories, alternative tourism opportunities and an interactive calendar. Abigail Kolker and Elizabeth Freed, two former Dorot Fellows, created PAVI with Dorot Foundation support "to act on behalf of the transformation you want to see in Israel. Now is the time to join Israel's leading civil society organizations and a global community of supporters to build a future of just peace and equality." *israelvolunteering.org*

Jewish Women, Sport, and Physical Culture

is the theme of a future issue of NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues. Do you have material you'd like to submit? Send abstracts for proposed research to Deborah Greniman, Managing Editor, by August 1, 2011 to *nashim@schechter.ac.il*.

Uncovering the Unexpected Blessings of Aging

Rabbi Dayle Friedman says "I first entered the land of the very old while I was at college. Friends invited me to join them in leading a Shabbat service in an 'old age home.' I was immediately captivated by things in this unfamiliar environment.... I felt blessed to be surrounded by sages who had broad and deep perspective. In many respects, I have never left that sublime terrain; I have dedicated my career to mining the Torah of aging—from elders themselves, and from Jewish teaching–and to sharing that wisdom." Find her blessing blog, where you can add to a blessing or request one, at *growingolder.co*.

ARTI DEUTSCH SCHREIER, COURTESY OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE MUSEUM NYC

Androgynous Storm Demons, Jealous Sisters and Knife Accidents

This is the world of "Half You Half Me," the second album in the ongoing art-rock song-cycle by Girls in Trouble, just out from JDub Records. With Girls in Trouble, Brooklyn poet and multi-instrumentalist Alicia Jo Rabins mines dark stories of Biblical women like Tamar and Yael, exploring "the hidden places where their complicated lives overlap with her own." The result is an album of fully orchestrated songs, intimate and wide-ranging, with upright bass, drums, accordion and layered electric guitars. *www.myspace.com/girlsintroublemusic*

Milk and Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry

features the work of poets Ellen Bass, Robin Becker, Elana Dykewomon, Marilyn Hacker, Sharron Hass, Eleanor Lerman, Joan Nestle, Lesléa Newman and Ellen Orleans, as well as new and emerging voices. Edited by Julie Enszer, this volume is in the Body Language Series from A Midsummer Night's Press. *amidsummernightspress.com*

Keeping Jerusalem Vibrant and Religiously Pluralistic

Against the background of Jerusalem's escalating conflict between ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) Jews and secular Jewish communities for control of the city, filmmaker/producer Liz Nord has made a documentary showing the cultural renaissance that is happening as a new wave of Jewish artists and activists navigate the complexities of creating change in this fascinating city. See a trailer for the film at *battleforjerusalem.com*.

SLUTS & ALLIES UNITE

Take Back the Night

"When we first heard about the Toronto Police officer labeling women and people most at risk of sexual assault as 'sluts', we thought about making noise and demanding for more than an apology." So say the organizers of this growing global mechanism for dialogue on victim-blaming and other damaging misogynist ideas. Originally, they walked to the front door of the Toronto Police. Thus was born SlutWalk, now taking place all over the world to protest, among other things, police stereotyping of women who wear revealing clothes. *Slutwalktoronto.com*

For events and projects taking place between issues of Lilith, follow Lilith on Facebook and Twitter, check out *Lilith.org, and sign up for Lilith's free e-mail newsletter.* Send suggestions for this section to *info@Lilith.org*.

—compiled by Naomi Danis & Liya Rechtman

In Memory of Jewish Anti-Apartheid Activists

Acknowledging the extraordinary sacrifices made by Jews in the anti-apartheid liberation movement in South Africa—hugely over-represented in proportion to their numbers—Liberia, Gambia and Sierra Leone have issued commemorative stamps featuring twelve activists. Included are Helen Suzman (1917–2009), a lone anti-apartheid voice in the South African parliament when she was elected in 1953; Esther Barsel (1924–2008), who served a prison term in a cell neighboring Nelson Mandela; Yetta Barenblatt (1913–1999), who used the hunger strike as a means of protest; Norma Kitson (1933–2002), who campaigned by nonstop picketing of the South African embassy in London's Trafalgar Square; Hilda Bernstein (1915–2006), an activist as well for women's rights; and Ruth First (1925–1982), killed by a bomb in a parcel addressed to her. Sunny Lubner, daughter of the Barsels, says of her parents, "They decided early on that they did not want to live in a society that frowned on blacks, Jews, communists, gays—everything. They were really ahead of their time in all of those issues." *legendaryheroesofafrica.com*

SO LIKE HELEN

BY E.W. JAMIESON

IT'S NOT THAT I ROUTINELY SEE GHOSTS, but sometimes in the chance turn of a head or a flash of color or sound, I am brought face to face with a moment ... a memory, fleeting, of someone I once loved. And so it was with two hands extended over the arm-rests of a bistro chair at a small outdoor café on Doheny Boulevard just south of Beverly Hills. Impossible as it was, I saw my mother-in-law. I recognized her immediately by her neatly manicured fingers pointing down as if to dry without hindrance.

I refused as a young mother to place my first-born, my son, into my mother-in-law Helen's arms. He was so fresh, so perfect. Helen was old. She was as old to me as time, as old as wind blowing through the mountains. I saw only old when I saw Helen. Cycling between weak and dizzy, she stood, stubbornly, unbalanced. She might refuse to eat if it wasn't what and when she wanted. She carried on about this and that, as I expected from someone percolating well into their 80s and then 90s.

I was too naive to see the woman she had once been, the mother she still was, the bubbe she could truly have become. I feared only that she could not steady herself enough for that robust baby boy, and so I didn't let her hold him.

Which isn't exactly true. At my son's bris, I sat Helen down in a Queen Anne chair, hovered over her, while for a moment she kept the baby on her lap, my hands constantly readjusting, tucking the blanket back around him. Every time she looked up (she was beaming) to greet a cousin or nephew, I swear I saw her lose focus and the baby dip towards the floor. I wasn't being mean, just protective, when I finally took the baby from her arms.

When she visited, if she sat on the couch, with a pillow in her lap, with me (or someone young) directly next to her, well, then, yes, she could sit with the baby in her lap, but just until she tired, and to me, she was always tired.

She was not asked to babysit.

There, though, in whatever stolen wisps of moments Helen found when I turned my back or reached to answer the phone, I know she fell in love. She loved that baby, she loved that baby so.

With those hands extended over the arm-rests of a bistro chair at a small outdoor café on Doheny Boulevard just south of Beverly Hills ... I felt, suddenly, the beckoning of Helen's empty arms. I saw that small baby boy looking up, long ago, into the now-irrelevant face of a short-term nanny or a babysitter. His soft water gurgles from lips so supple. Helen would have bent down, with baby in arms, to kiss those lips.

Old is as old does. When I was just past 30, old was so far away, over rivers filled with incapacity and half-forgotten names. But now I ... I am on the cusp of old so very old, older than the wind. I tell my children I made mistakes. Please, I beg to innocent eyes, let me hold the baby.

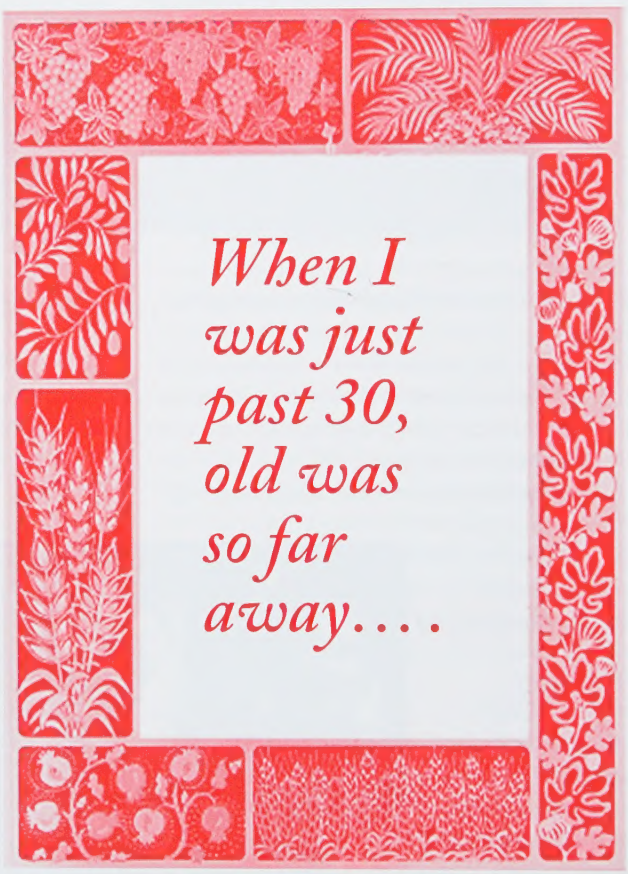

IMAGE © BETSY TEUTSCH

Erica W. Jamieson is an award-winning creative non-fiction writer and blogger living in Los Angeles.